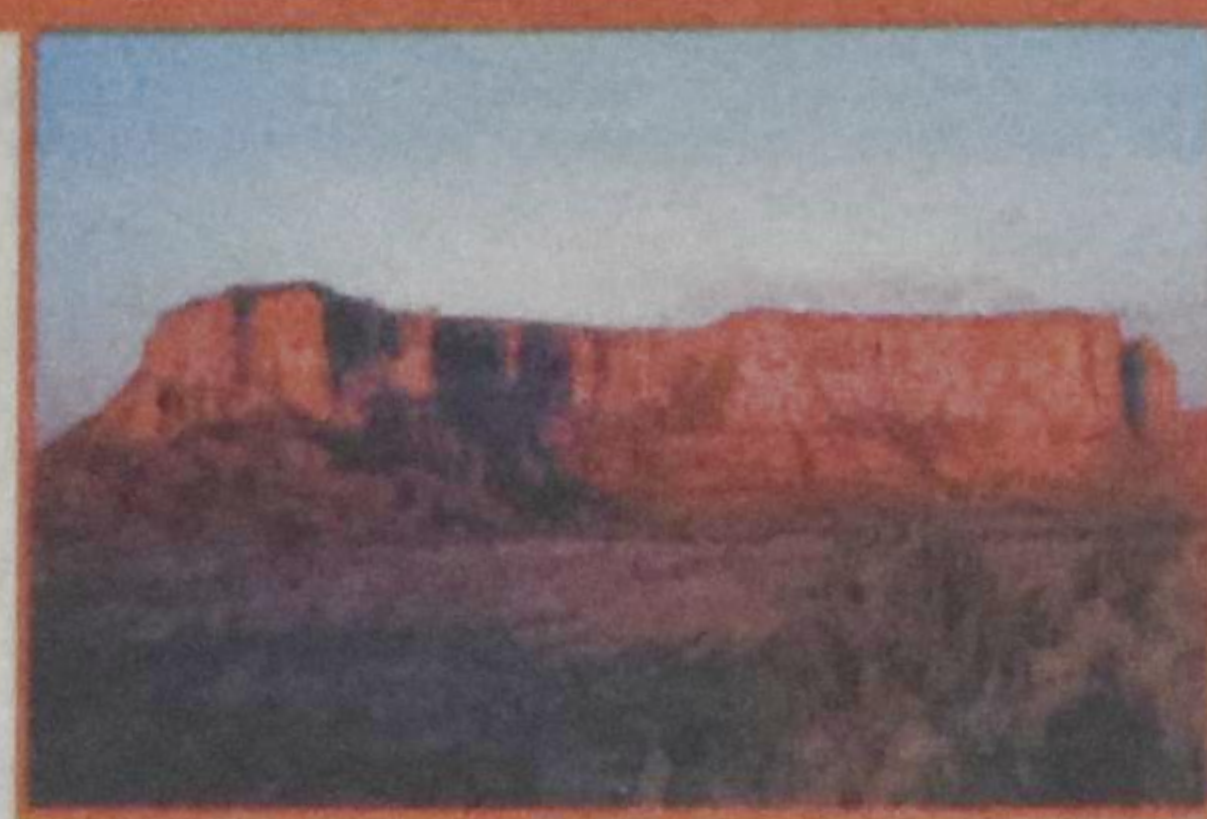




A dare for the church
PAGE 4



Figurative truth
PAGE 8



Schaap on ZCMS
PAGE 10

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OCT 12 2012

Knitting behind bars
PAGE 20

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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIANCOURIER



A thanks-giving revolution Q+A with Ann Voskamp



Gratitude is central to a life of faith, Voskamp says.

Angela Reitsma Bick

Canadian Ann Voskamp is a household name. You've seen her book, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, at church, at Chapters,

on Facebook each time her fans count their blessings. As Voskamp's first (and only) book, *One Thousand Gifts* has been a marketing phenomenon. Since publishing it December 2010,

Zondervan has sold over half a million copies. It has consistently topped best-seller lists in the *New York Times* and on *Amazon.com*, which is unusual for an explicitly Christian book.

Voskamp's blog, *A Holy Experience*, has also exploded in popularity. Twenty thousand people follow her on Twitter. There's already a gift spinoff, a devotional version and—coming this December—a six-session DVD series for small groups: the *One Thousand Gifts Study Guide*. God has taken Voskamp's gift for writing and multiplied it more than a thousand-fold.

The first time I read *One Thousand Gifts*, so much of it resonated with me: I've "lived the strangle," scrawled "failure" on my own half-finished story. But Voskamp calls that mentality a sin. And she reminds us how to conquer it—by routinely giving thanks. She has started a thankfulness revolution. *Christian Courier* was grateful for the rare chance to ask Ann Voskamp a few questions.

What is the take-away message of One Thousand Gifts?

Voskamp: That our understanding of God's sovereignty, of his character, his love, his grace, his wisdom, his righteousness, all orbit around our gratefulness. Simply: gratitude is at the centre of a life of faith. It sounds too simple to be true, but isn't that the sign of all deep truth? So simple. See Q+A with Ann Voskamp on p. 2



Gratitude

This week, the news of the world is bleak, another war grinding on, and all these friends down with cancer, or worse, a little something long term that they won't die of for twenty or thirty miserable years—

And here I live in a house of weathered brick, where a man with silver hair still thinks I'm beautiful. How many times have I forgotten to give thanks? The late day sun shines through the pink wisteria with its green and white leaves as if it were stained glass, there's an old cherry tree that one lucky Sunday bloomed with a rainbow: cardinals, orioles, goldfinches, blue jays, indigo buntings, and my garden has tiny lettuces just coming up, so perfect they could make you cry: Green Towers, Red Sails, Oak Leaf. For this is May, and the whole world sings, gleams, as if it were basted in butter, and the air's sweet enough to send a diabetic into shock—

And at least today, all the parts of my body are working, the sky's clear as a china bowl, leaves murmur their leafy chatter, finches percolate along. I'm doodling around this page, know sorrow's somewhere beyond the horizon, but still, I'm riffing on the warm air, the wingbeats of my lungs that can take this all in, flush the heart's red peony, then send it back without effort or thought. And the trees breathe in what we exhale, clap their green hands in gratitude, bend to the sky.

Barbara Crooker

We gratefully acknowledge Barbara Crooker's permission to use her poem here. Its setting is May, but the theme suits this Thanksgiving issue perfectly.

Meditation/Interview

Thankfulness: catalyst of our gifts

Louis M. Tamminga

Thankfulness is a remarkable gift. It can never be put in its place. Once it becomes a quality of the soul, it spills over into every crevice. It is like yeast that slowly embraces every particle of the flour. It is the catalyst of all our virtues.

To “thank” comes from the same root as to “think.” Thankfulness is “think-fulness” – thoughtfulness. Our thankfulness imbues our awareness, it stirs our virtues, it adorns our motives with a sheen of beauty.

Thankfulness never comes just by itself. When expressed, it will invite one or more virtues to come along. I once led a retreat of a mission community in Nigeria. I asked those present, “When you think of a very grateful person, what is such a person like?” Suggestions came quickly: “Affectionate . . . cheerful . . . generous . . . content . . . appreciative . . . peaceful . . . gracious . . . helpful . . . modest . . . secure . . . winsome . . . forgiving . . . selfless . . . courteous . . . kind . . . affable . . . patient.” Someone added, “Such a person might well have a touch of elegance or be a person of gravitas.”

Thankfulness, more than other gifts, plays a wonderful role in cementing relationships. In his book *Space for God*, Don Postema points out that expressing thanks closes the circle between giver and receiver. He states, “Actually, the exchange is more like a spiral – a spiral in which the

**Giving thanks creates
light and hope.**

giver gets thanked and so becomes the receiver and the joy of giving and receiving rises higher and higher.”

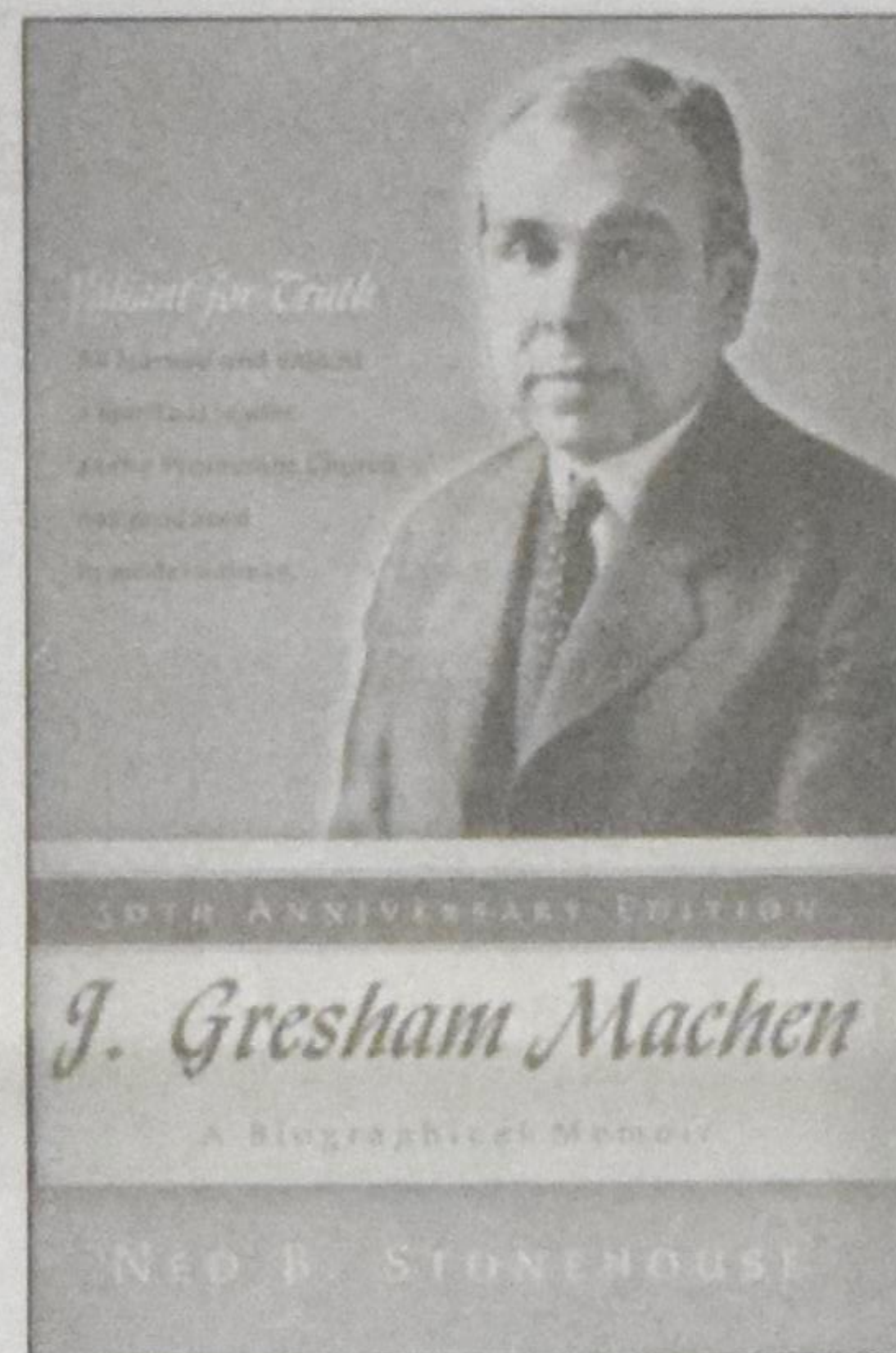
That is why thanksgiving may transform the simplest human encounter into moments of delight. The late Rev. Clarence Boomsma, dean of CRC ministers, tells a story to which we can relate. He visited a woman who had struggled with pain, illness

and worries. Lonely as she was, she talked about her situation at some length. At one point Boomsma suggested that they pray. But then he paused and asked her whether she could mention some things for which they could thank the Lord. Well, yes, she could mention some. Actually, there were several. The atmosphere changed. Joy began to dispel heaviness. “Giving thanks will do that,” said Boomsma. “It creates light and hope.”

A happiness project

We think a lot about our own well-being. What accounts for our health and happiness? Where do we find the strength to go on from day to day? What sustains us during the demands of life? Thankfulness may well be the conduit that connects us with deeper sources of strength. An interesting example of that is related by the late Prof. Ned B. Stonehouse in his book, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*.

Dr. Machen was the founder and first president of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and Dr. Stonehouse was among its first professors. Dwelling on those early days, he tells of the extraordinary demands made on Machen: “with the inception of Westminster . . . he carried out an almost incredible program of service. All that he accomplished was because of his astonishing energies.”



Graciousness was among Machen's strengths.

But then Stonehouse goes on to explore the person of Machen a bit further. He writes, “Machen was a man of rare graciousness and considerateness . . . and singular magnanimity of spirit. Whenever he asked his co-workers some small service, he made the request as if asking the greatest favor in the world. And when assent was gained, he overwhelmed one with warmhearted expressions of profound appreciation.” That, Stonehouse implied, was the deeper secret of Machen’s strength. During those hectic days of Westminster’s beginnings, the reality of thankfulness created an atmosphere of peace, acceptance and appreciation. In that setting, other gifts were affirmed, and strength was renewed. This, I believe, is true for all people regardless of their faith commitment.

Praising the Giver

The prophet Daniel was a man of outstanding prayer. It is interesting to read that his praying mostly came in the package of thanksgiving. And that, undoubtedly, was the secret of his strength. When Daniel and his friends were in real danger to be executed with the other wise men of Babylon, Daniel pleaded with his God to save them. But that prayer was marked by praise and thanksgiving. And it was the source of his strength. We read, “I thank and praise you, O God, you have given me power . . .” (2:20-23). Later, when the satraps and governors convinced King Darius to kill Daniel, we read again: “he went down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God” (6:10).

For Paul all the utterances of his soul found their source and direction in his Saviour Christ. He said, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15).

Louis Tamminga (ljamminga@yahoo.com) is a retired CRC pastor. He served churches in Canada and the U.S. He is the author of *The Elder's Handbook*.

Q+A with Ann Voskamp *continued*

we’re tempted to dismiss it, and so hard, it is exactly what God uses to change our hard lives.

My parents emigrated as children from the Netherlands, and so did many of Christian Courier’s readers. Your in-laws are Dutch. The story of your brother-in-law’s lost children, and his stoic acceptance of God’s sovereignty, is astonishingly moving. What characteristics of faith have you gleaned from your in-laws?



Voskamp: An unwavering assurance in the goodness of God, in never leaving a meal table until you eat the real food, living bread, God’s Word, in singing praises to God while your work faithfully – in being people who read the Word and then live it.

You write that “the slower the living, the greater the sense of fullness and satisfaction” (76). Is there any tension between that sentence and your online life?

Voskamp: I am unspeakably grateful for living the quiet life of a farmer’s wife and homeschooling these six kids and making it our ambition to lead a quiet life, working with our hands and glorifying Him in all things.

How do you find time alone with God? When do you write?
Voskamp: Time alone with God: late and early, the fringe hours, the margin on the edges of day. I’m also discovering this: when memorizing Scripture, turning his words about us during the day, all time becomes time with him.

Writing: our six kids wake also in the dark, and head out to the barn and chores for the first two or three hours of every day – this gives me time to write. For me, in the writing of words, I meet the Spirit of God.

As parents, what do you and your husband do to cultivate gratefulness into one another and into your kids?

Voskamp: We have several family rhythms that help us to live out thanks to God:

- keeping a sticky pad in the caddy at the table and jotting down a few blessings before noon meal, sticking the notes up on our chalkboard.
- keeping a family gratitude journal on a table and scratching out our blessings throughout the day.
- carrying little booklets, *7 Gifts: Good and Perfect*, tucked in our pockets, for jotting down our graces throughout the day, seven blessings for seven days of the week.
- hanging a monthly gratitude calendar on the fridge (free printable version at aholyexperience.com).

Ultimately, we have to preach it to who needs to hear it most: *ourselves*. I often have to audibly give God thanks throughout the day as a means of stress intervention, as a means of vocally fixing the eyes of the heart on Christ. This too is a way of cultivating a family culture of gratitude.

It’s clear from the collection of quotes in your book that you’re an avid reader. Does your whole family love to read?

Voskamp: Ah, God makes us all differently and for the Farmer, reading Scripture is paramount, but otherwise he works quietly with his hands. For me, reading is a way to learn and be mentored by wise Christ-followers whom I will never have the privilege of meeting, a way of our children being taught by deeply thoughtful minds. And importantly, if we are a literature-based family, our thinking and minds are more likely to be shaped by words, and less by visual stimulation, and this is a very different way of thinking – an old, deep, historical way of thinking.

What’s next for you as an author?

Voskamp: I don’t think of myself as an author. But simply as a grateful child of God, adopted only by his cross-grace. To stay on my knees. John 3:27 has long been a life verse: “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.” Any more words will only be solely a gift from

See Q+A with Ann Voskamp on p. 3



Download a free app to count your blessings at aholyexperience.com

News

Principalities
& Powers

David Koyzis



On stage again: the PQ's return engagement



They're back. After finishing a nine-year run on the political stage, the Parti québécois had seen the curtain fall on their performance in 2003 and the provincial Liberal Party take their place. But every play must come to an end, and Jean Charest's star quality had worn pretty thin in the meantime. So last month saw Quebecers give the PQ another chance at appealing to the audience where the Liberals had failed.

Founded in 1968, the Parti québécois came to power for the first time eight years later under the leadership of former provincial Liberal cabinet minister René Lévesques. As federal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was seeking a way to patriate Canada's constitution, Lévesques began to prepare the way for a referendum on what he called sovereignty-association for Québec.

The PQ has returned to power twice since then – in 1994 and now in 2012. Lévesques took nearly four years before he held his referendum, which he lost by a three to two margin. His successor, Jacques Parizeau, held the 1995 referendum a year after he became premier. The federalist side won by a breathtakingly narrow margin, leaving the country and the province weary of the seemingly intractable constitutional issue. Will the new premier, Pauline Marois, follow her predecessors and hold yet a third referendum at some point during her term in office?

In 2007, while in opposition, Marois introduced into the National Assembly a private member's bill, numbered 195, the Québec Identity Act, which proposed that Québec draft its own constitution, establish its own citizenship and require newcomers to learn French to acquire this citizenship – all markers of sovereign nationhood. Whether Québec has the authority to do any of these things is in doubt, yet Marois's proposals indicate a potential willingness to assert her province's powers beyond the limits imposed by Canada's constitution.

Nevertheless, it is no longer 1976. Nor is it 1994. The political backdrop has changed in the intervening years. First, the PQ has only a minority government. With less than 32 percent of the popular vote and only 53 of the 135 seats in the National Assembly, the PQ can hardly claim a strong mandate for pursuing sovereignty. With a 75-percent voter turnout rate, only around 24 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots for a party historically favouring sovereignty, which is scarcely a ringing endorsement of this elusive goal.

Stage notes

Second, the election campaign was fought mostly on other issues, especially the economy and the ongoing student protests against university tuition hikes. Had Marois openly advocated independence, she might not have received as many votes as she did.

Third, when the last two referenda were held, there was no legal or constitutional basis for even discussing separation. Now there is. Since 2000 the Clarity Act, largely drafted by former Liberal leader Stéphane Dion during his tenure as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, is the law of the land, laying out the procedures whereby the federal government would agree to negotiate the separation of a province from Canada. The legal hurdles are



What new plot twists will Marois bring to the stage as premier?

placed deliberately high to ensure that such a move would command a popular consensus before being attempted by a provincial government.

So what can we expect from Marois's turn on the stage? Will she follow the expected plotline and push for sovereignty? We have reason to assume that she will try to acquire for Québec as much autonomy as she can vis-à-vis Ottawa in as many policy areas as possible. No unusual twists in the script here. Such an effort would have the support of the other players in the National Assembly and would not endanger her minority position. Indeed she might even have the co-operation of the federal government on some issues, such as employment insurance, currently a federal responsibility.

Yet not as many people bought tickets to this play as she had hoped, perhaps portending a shorter than usual run. The curtain could fall before all the action is over, and Marois could find herself relegated to a supporting role in another play with a new cast of characters. But for now: on with the show! ➤

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca) teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, where all the students are strong, all the staff good looking and all the faculty above average.

Q+A with Ann Voskamp *continued*

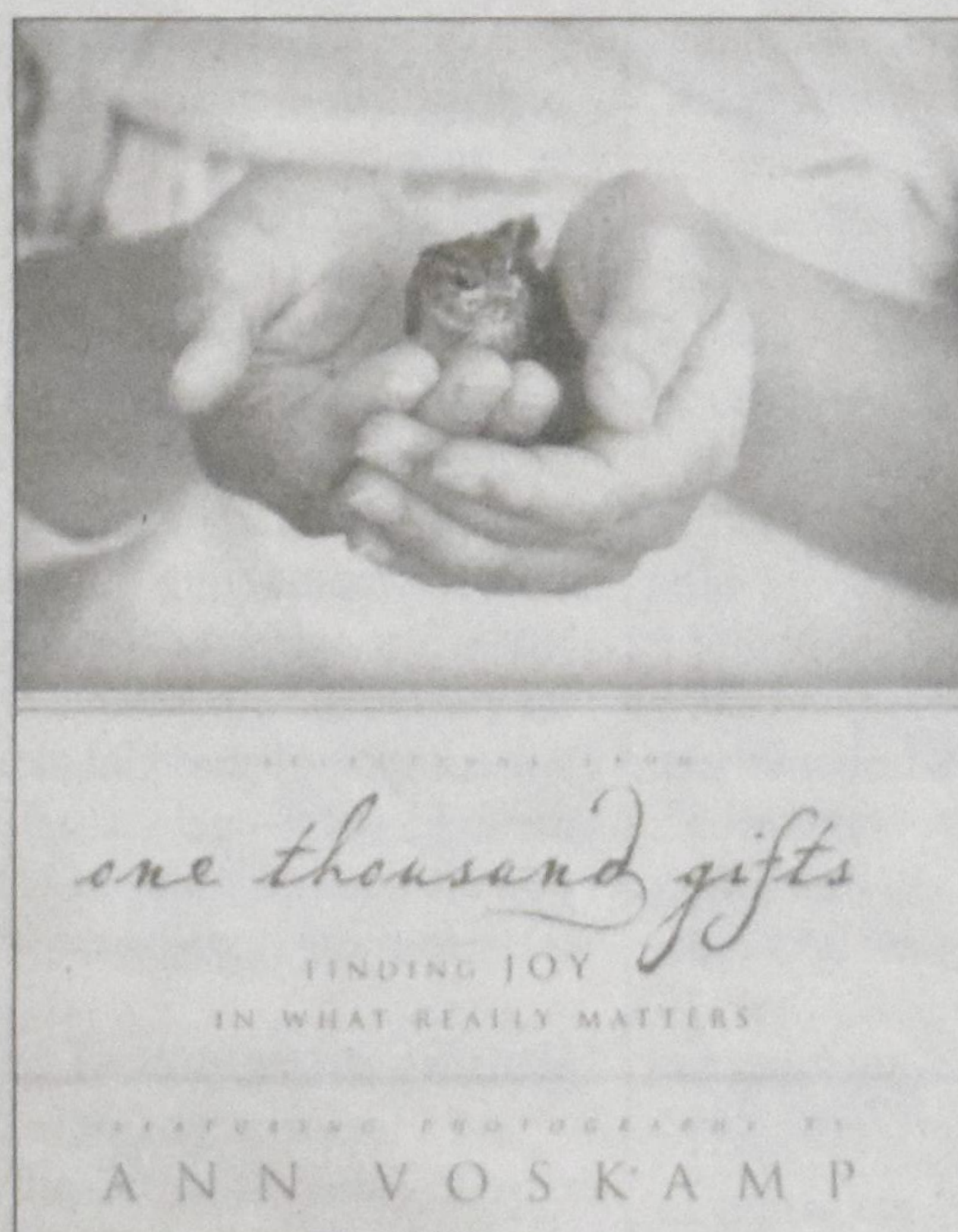
him. I have begun to write – and am excited about what he has next!

Proceeds from One Thousand Gifts go to Compassion International. How can Christians be a blessing, like that, for others?

Voskamp: My first suggestion is to make time reflecting on the everyday grace of God in your life a daily priority. If we don't make focusing on his personal grace to us a priority, filling on his love for us, how can we give grace to the persons around us – what do we have to pour out?

And then, second suggestion: expose your life to real need. Visit a developing country. Take a short term mission trip. Write an inmate, send a letter to a sponsored child, serve in the inner city, at a food bank, with a crisis pregnancy center. Make time for shut-ins, the elderly, the sick, the single-parents, the new believers. As a family, for each person in the family: just find one way you can make your awareness of your gift-graced life intersect with a real place of need – and Christ in us will do the rest. ➤

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of Christian Courier. She lives in Barrie, Ont.



Voskamp's first book has sold half a million copies.

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Editorials

Dear Benjamin

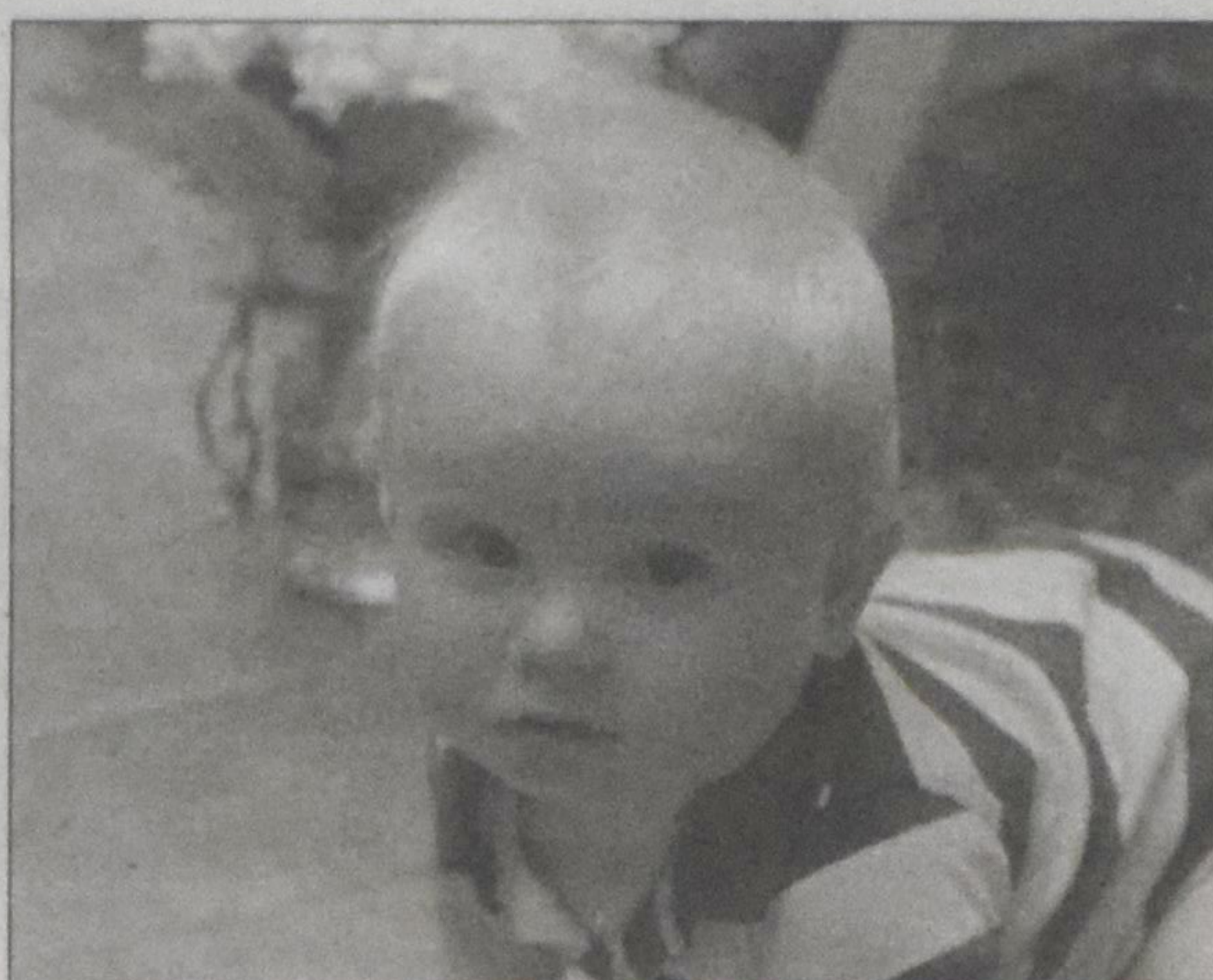


Angela Reitsma Bick

Congratulations on this, your first birthday. A year ago today you were born waving your right hand, which fit the meaning of your name: son of my right hand.

It was hard to pick your name. Much easier to make fun of strange baby names, like the son of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver named Buddy Bear. I can't imagine having to name all the stars, as God has done. In this one tiny act – naming someone – we copy the creator. It feels appropriately weighty. As parents, we'll be judged by your name just as we will be by your behaviour as a toddler in the grocery store and, eventually, by your high school haircut.

Your name might change as you age, of course: most people collect a few nicknames or surnames over the years. And if Buddy Bear Oliver hates his name at age 16, he can pay \$137 to legally change it. This process was free for the ancient Israelites as far as I know. Did I tell you that Rachel originally called your namesake *Benoni*, which means "son of my sorrow"? After Rachel's death, Jacob took this twelfth son and blessed him as *Binyamin*: "son of my right hand," or "son of strength," as it's sometimes translated.



Benjamin, nine months old.

GEORGE PERALTA

A transformative year

Last week, while you were learning how to walk, a familiar 50-year-old got a brand new name. The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) has shed its tongue-twisting symmetry to become, in brief, World Renew. Three short syllables, which seem to be the style lately. You may not have noticed that WorldWide Christian Schools-Canada (WWCS-C) ditched its old name too, a few months before you were born. That organization is now known as EduDeo. And when you were a newborn just starting to smile, the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association (OCSTA) unrolled its new title: Edifide.

You know, I don't blame them for replacing the baffling mouthfuls of letters. But I wonder. I wonder if anything has been misplaced in the makeover attempts. Each organization eliminated the word "Christian," for example. And I'm not sure if some vaguely upbeat and quasi-Latin slogans can convey the same specific meaning as the original, more transparent titles. Can we stop calling ourselves Christian and maintain an identity in Christ?

I know you're still little. One day, however, you will be asked: *What's your name? Where are you from?* And people will pay attention to your answer.

But the truth is that they'll pay even more attention to your actions. "It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts," James says (2:4, *MSG*).

So we shouldn't have worried so much about getting your name right. Or rather, we

should worry at least as much now about getting your heart right – right with God, the one who made you. You can call yourself Buddy Bear the Second if you want, but do it as a child of God. I will mourn your old name. The new one will take some getting used to. But a name isn't the only thing that defines you. Like World Renew and EduDeo and Edifide need to, remember where you came from when you introduce yourself. Remember your roots, and then get ready.

God has work for the children of his right hand to do. ✕

Angela Bick is Editor of Christian Courier, formerly Calvinist Contact. She has stubbornly hung on to her maiden name, Reitsma.

The dopamine made me do it:
The Church and mental illness

Meredith K.C. Gipson Hoogendam

I have postpartum depression. While I struggle daily to deal with "PPD," as it is known, I recognize that on the spectrum of such illnesses, I am far from extreme. Mashed somewhere between the disturbingly saccharine title of "Baby Blues" and the grandiosely vague category of "Major Depression," I take up a space that is, ironically, far from isolated. As lonely as new mothers – especially those with

PPD – feel, ours is a far from rare state of being. But it's difficult to take cheer in the notion that, while you are feeling bereft, suicidal and overwhelmingly guilty, along with you for the wild ride are some 13 percent of all new mothers (WebMD.com). Beyond PPD in particular, the fact is, according to the Center for Disease Control, one in four North Americans has a mental illness (Psychcentral.com). With a statistic like that, it's a wonder that such stigma surrounding mental illness still exists – how can it, when each one of us can likely name at least one person in our direct or peripheral existence who suffers from a mental illness? With a statistic like that, it's a wonder that the silence surrounding mental illness remains so deafening, especially in our faith communities. It is time for both the stigma and the silence to end, and what better place to begin that ending than the Church?

Let me back up. Although my condition may be a surprise to those friends and family who don't monitor me daily, PPD wasn't a surprise to me. If mental illness were an Olympic sport, my family would be gold, baby, several generations running. From death in a mental institution to fits of psychosis at the county fair, my family, like many others, has its laundry list of psychic

pains. Lest I seem flippant, let me also say that another trait passed down through the generations on both sides is humour, and for this, I am grateful. If we, the farmers of our individual psychic plots, can't use our pain as a sort of metaphysical manure to fertilize deep happiness, then what's the point? Thank you to my parents for handing me both the manure and the shovel to spread it with.



One quarter of your congregation battles mental illness (Church pew with worshippers, Van Gogh, 1882).

Holding up, holding on

I still remember the first time an adult formally validated for me the difficulty of living with a person with a mental illness. When my grade ten health teacher, Mr. Papazian, pulled me aside after class to ask me about a comment I had made regarding my sister with schizophrenia, I was blown away. *And how are you holding up?* he asked. Never before had anyone taken an interest in my well being as it related to my sister's mental illness. In fact, the implied message around our house was: if you're not the one hallucinating, you don't have anything to complain about. In the face of my teacher's compassion, I broke down. I honestly didn't realize at the time that I was *allowed* to feel anything.

Like many who live with schizophrenia and related disorders, medication seems a double-edged sword. Sure, with medication my sister's life would be more balanced. She might be able to hold a job, or go back to school. She would stop screaming at the television and rearranging furniture in her bathing suit while chain smoking and listening to Bruce Springsteen at top volume at four in the morning. These would obviously be good things. On the other hand, with the dissipation of delusion and thwarting of mania can come a type of stranglehold placidity and numbness that are, in many ways, worse than the wild and dangerously free world of the "natural" or un-medicated mind, not to mention the charming side effects of weight gain and loss of muscle function. My parents were learning on the go, without much support from Community Mental Health.

Calling all agents of compassion

As a teenager and new Christian, I spent many hours praying that God would cure my sister. Despite all signs pointing the other way, I held out hope. Within the denomination of which I was then a part, there was no firm conclusion as to the nature of mental illness. Was schizophrenia simply demonic possession? Fears that it was the devil, and not the dopamine, that pulled the strings on my sister's erratic

See *Mental illness* on p. 5

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick editor@christiancourier.ca
Features Editor: Cathy Smith cathy@christiancourier.ca
Church Page Editor: Marian Van Til marianvantil@roadrunner.com
Review Editor: Nick Schuurman reviews@christiancourier.ca
Contributing Editor: Bert Witvoet bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca
Contributing Editor: Michael Buma mike@christiancourier.ca
Admin/Bus. ads/Web: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer ads@christiancourier.ca
Circulation/Fam. ads: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca

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5 Joanna Dr 1-800-969-4838
St Catharines ON L2N 1V1 Web site: christiancourier.ca

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Canada

Letters

With thanks

This issue marks the last column by Harry Antonides. He has been writing "The Public Square" since 2009, but his contributions to *Christian Courier* and the Reformed community in Canada go much further back. Antonides is founding Editor of *Cardus* and the author of *Stones for Bread*, *Multinationals and the Peaceable Kingdom*, and *A Critical Look at Collective Bargaining*. CC thanks him for his integrity and commitment as a Christian writer observing the public square from his particular vantage point.

— Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor

Mental illness *continued*

behaviour kept me up at night. If it was spiritual warfare that was necessary, I felt ill-equipped. What I did not know to even look for was a different, more practical kind of support from the church. I'm no math major, but if one in four North Americans has a mental illness, then a quarter of the people in your church's pews do too. This deserves attention.

As I write this article, my sister is doing relatively well, and although she suffers from pockets of delusion, she manages to live on her own without much assistance from my parents. Soon, however, the winds will howl, the leaves will fall from the trees, and the skies will turn a steely grey. In autumn, even those with shiny dispositions reach for the SAD lamp and curl up early to bed. Fitting, then, that WHO (the World Health Organization) has declared October 10, 2012, "World Mental Health Day." I deeply believe that it is time for those of us in the faith community to recognize our responsibility as agents of compassion to the quarter of humanity, and the even greater throngs of family members and friends, who deal with mental illness on a daily basis. Why not start by celebrating World Mental Health Day as a congregation? I charge and challenge the Church to make caring for the mentally ill and their loved ones a priority for the 2012-2013 year and beyond. Or, as I say to my niece and nephew (and sometimes my students): *I DARE you to do it. I bet you can't. Prove me wrong!* May we as the Church recognize our power and responsibility to be agents of change amidst a society plagued by a common but curable illness: Silence. ✂

Meredith K.C. Hoogendam is a writer and educator. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario with her beloved family and two wily canines. See below for mental health resources and opportunities.

What next?

Shalem Mental Health Network (formerly Salem) is a faith-based, Ontario-focused network that provides responsive mental health support and resources: shalemnetwork.org.

Faith and Hope Ministries (initiated by the CRC of Classis Quinte) is hosting a conference called Spreading the Word; Making the Difference, Nov. 9-10 in Cobourg, Ont.: faithandhopeministries.net.

Disability Concerns is a ministry of the CRC that helps churches become healthier communities where everyone belongs and everyone serves: crcna.org.

The Mennonite Central Committee of Canada has a threefold Mental Health and Disabilities Program, including education, support and professional help: mcc.org.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a nation-wide charitable organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the recovery of people experiencing mental illness: cmha.ca.

What can I do?

Download a free, four-session Bible study from faithandhopeministries.net called "Let's Talk: Breaking the Silence around Mental Illness in our Communities of Faith."

Donate a book on mental illness to your church library.

Create a list of local community mental health services for your church to use.

Explore existing programs, such as church-based Wraparound through Shalem, as a way of organizing and sustaining the God-given impulses within a congregation to effectively support people dealing with mental illness.

Invite a speaker from your local community resources or denominational ministries to speak about mental illness.

Check out and use sermons, liturgies, prayers and devotions that speak to mental illness issues and needs.

Open your church to a local support group or organize a support group with other churches in your area.

Break the silence about mental illness by talking about it together without judgment and listening to personal stories.

— June Zwier, Shalem Mental Health Network

Mental Health Awareness Day
October 10, 2012

Migrant workers treated well in Ontario

While I acknowledge the injustices that farm workers face in a general sense, I was disappointed in your editorial comments in "We are all Strangers" (Sept. 10, *Christian Courier*). In particular, you quote from a book which is based on the American food supply system, which misleads your readers into believing that a similar situation of migrants earning a paltry \$19 for nine hours of work can and does exist here in Canada.

While I am not familiar with the precise details of Canadian legislation for migrant workers, through my work as a taxi driver I have gotten to know a number of workers from Mexico who work at farms in the Grimsby area. I have also spoken with a couple of greenhouse operators in Grimsby about their use of migrant workers from Mexico. From both of these sources I believe that the Canadian experience is vastly different than the way you portray the situation in your article.

For example, the farm operations for the two farms pay for their workers to get a taxi into town and return, once per week, so that they can purchase groceries and supplies.

Second, while the migrant workers don't get paid overtime for their 60 hour work weeks, neither do Canadians who work on farm operations! Furthermore, farmers who employ migrant workers in Canada must follow a strict protocol, such as paying for the workers' return airfare and providing clean, comfortable living conditions.

Come late fall, when the migrant workers return to their home countries and families, they also bring with them significant amounts of cash, which is injected into their home communities and has collectively raised the standard of living in many poor countries.

A final comment, which speaks to our work-ethic and attitudes as Canadians and Americans. The two farmers I spoke with both stated that they have hired Canadian workers in the past; however, they both found that the Canadian workers were not committed to their job on the farm and the farmers struggled with a high turnover rate.

Looking forward to more good reading in the CC,

Jon Masselink
Grimsby, Ont.

Why John Suk had to leave

It occurs to me that it is one thing to have doubts, another to doubt. I read and reread John Suk's *Not Sure* some time ago. It was for me a fascinating and liberating experience. John Suk was not just relating the tired sermon that most ministers have preached at least once, about how they too have doubts and how everyone does and how that is even good because it reveals a lively and inquisitive faith. No, this was a minister publicly stating that he doubts.

The book is as important for what it does not say as for what it does say. There is to my recollection no ringing endorsement of the Trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection or the confessions, to name a few unassailable "truths" of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). To my knowledge, these items are generally not even open to discussion in the CRC. Probably these are "deal breakers," to use Jim Dekker's phrase (Sept. 10, *Christian Courier*). Yet I believe that

it is precisely such items the church should be discussing freely and in love.

Jim Dekker believes the church has taken far more "space and energy than is wise or warranted" with respect to the homosexual issue. He feels that this is especially so as there is little mention of it in Scripture, and never by Jesus. I dare say the point is that Jesus teaches only that we love each other and in this way denounces the treatment the church has so often afforded the homosexuals. When our church made this point, the revered late Rev. Eppinga advised that our church should leave the denomination. If a controversial stand on the gay issue warrants separation, then I see no alternative but for John Suk to leave. I do not fault him. The CRC is not open to all who love God and their neighbor; it appears to require much, much more.

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News



CRWRC becomes World Renew

Marian Van Til, with files from CRCNA and CRC Network

BURLINGTON, Ontario – The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), which is currently celebrating 50 years of international development work and disaster intervention, has publicly changed its name to “World Renew.”

The change occurred after a more than year-long internal agency debate, solicitation of opinions from church members and then ultimate approval by the Christian Reformed Church’s general synod in June. To coincide with the change, World Renew launched a new website on September 17.

“The organization has broadened and its scope has expanded exponentially since its start 50 years ago,” World Renew’s U.S. director, Andrew Ryskamp, said in an agency press release. “Our work reaches well beyond the Christian Reformed Church, involves much more than disaster response and has been overseen by a board, rather than a committee, for decades.”

CRWRC became the CRC’s benevolence ministry in 1962. Not long after, leaders began to add “long-term global poverty solutions” to the ministry’s emergency disaster efforts. Then the relief and development ministries began to be carried out collaboratively with “vulnerable people groups.”

Today, World Renew says it responds to disasters in North America and in 27 developing countries. It works in 24 of these and other countries in what it calls “sustainable transformation.” It coordinates local and international volunteers by the thousands, encourages advocacy work and helps impoverished communities by working with 76 faith-based and government organizations around the world. Last year, CRWRC says, it “touched the lives of 1.75 million people in 4,050 poor communities.”

Why World Renew?

“World Renew better reflects who we are and what we are about as a trusted, established non-profit that is working to help eradicate the root causes of extreme global poverty through the renewal of relationships with God, neighbor, and the environment,” the agency’s director in Canada, Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, said in the press release. “Changing our name doesn’t change our work or convictions. As World Renew, our values and mandate as a Christian ministry are the same: to reach out to those who are struggling to survive poverty, hunger, disaster, and injustice around the world.”

Despite that reasoning not everyone is happy with the name change. When synod discussed whether to approve the new name, some delegates were unhappy that “World Renew” would not allow those unfamiliar with the agency to know from its name that it is Christian. (There is, however, a cross in the new logo.) Others saw no need to disassociate – at least in the name – with being Christian Reformed. Still others noted that World Renew might cause confusion because there is a Catholic publication by that name which aims to bring young people who are lapsed Catholics back to the church.

The majority of synod delegates put aside those objections in approving the change. But some other church members haven’t been so easily convinced. In the discussion forum in the CRC’s online Network, a participant signing himself “IndyPastor” wrote, before the change went public, “. . . having worked most of my career outside of the CRC and in the service sector as well as the church, I can tell you that CRWRC is the most recognizable name on many assistance sites. My fear is that you will lose the branding by changing the name to something unrecognizable.”

John Zylstra from Faith Fellowship CRC in Fairview, Alberta, agreed. “The whole name change seems to be done for very pragmatic reasons, while ignoring the spiritual implications. Ironically, pragmatic reasons will eventually not sustain themselves, and the spiritual foundations of CRWRC will decline.”

Clearly, World Renew leaders take issue with those negative views. The agency’s new website explains the name change this way: “Reflecting, Responding, Renewing has been the theme of 50 years of ministry for CRWRC. A major part of Renewing is the introduction of World Renew as our new name. We believe that God has called us to be partners in the ministry of reconciliation in this world, that he has works prepared in advance for us to do, and we are guided by the words from Romans 12: 2: ‘Do not conform to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.’ In partnership with communities, with the global church, with partners around the world, we look forward to fulfilling that biblical mandate.”

Redeemer College to collaborate with Presbyterian Church re: Ghana

ANCASTER, Ontario (RUC) – Redeemer University College has long had a presence in the African nation of Ghana. Internships, some funded by CIDA

(Canadian International Development Agency), have allowed students to work in the city of Asamankese on a variety of community development programs.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) has also had a vibrant ministry in the area for many years. There are a number of Presbyterian churches in the city, and the PCC also supports His Majesty’s School, a Christian school in Asamankese.

On September 24, representatives of both the PCC and Redeemer signed a “memorandum of understanding” that outlines and formalizes a new partnership to support their mutual efforts in Ghana.

The key speakers at the ceremony were Dr. Richard Fee, general secretary of the PCC’s Life and Mission Agency and Redeemer president Dr. Hubert Krygsman. Current and future



Student interns focus on immediate needs and sustainable, long-term goals.

Redeemer interns to Ghana also participated.

Twenty student interns will go to Ghana over the next four years, building on projects started by previous interns.

The current project focuses on developing and delivering programs that foster adult women’s literacy and sustainable economic growth. It is essential that the internship work is focused on local needs and that the interns work with people from the community to accomplish mutual goals. The work of the internships continues long after the interns leave as locals are invested in each project. This point is very important in addressing immediate needs and working towards a sustainable future.

Dr. Mary Ashun, a Ghana native and professor in Redeemer’s department of education, oversees the internship program.

‘Even ministers don’t vote Christian anymore’: Surprises in the Dutch election

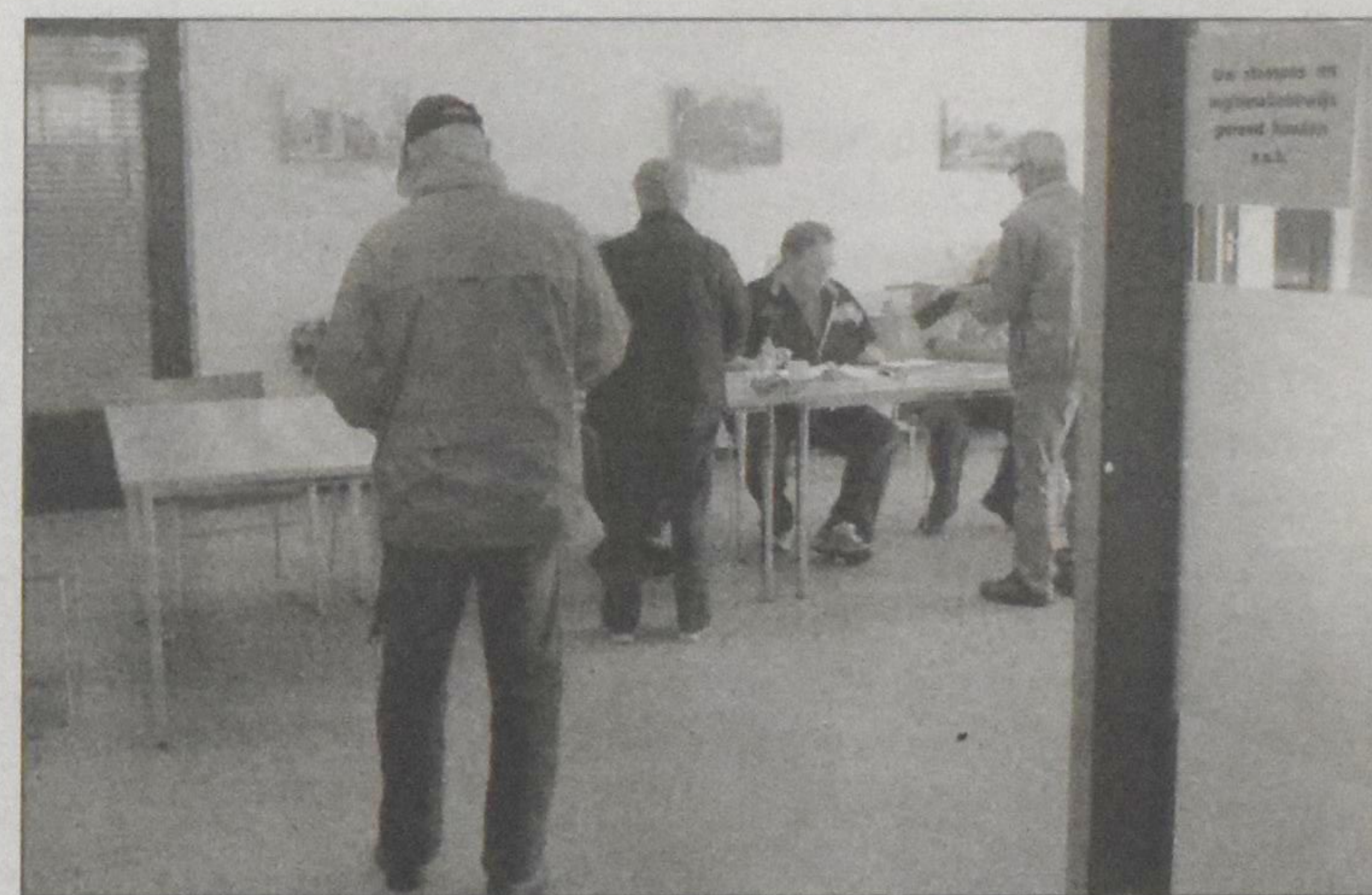
Bert den Boggende

BARNEVELD, the Netherlands – On Sept 1, Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the VVD, the right Liberal Party, was leading the other 20 parties. His closest challenger was Emile Roemer of the SP, the left Socialist Party. Every day there were TV debates. The debates focused on three central issues: financial assistance to Greece and the financial crisis, the role of the European Union and health care.

Geert Wilders of the PVV, the Party of Freedom, argued for no assistance to Greece. Rutte favoured financial assistance but under certain conditions, Diederik Samsom of the P.v.d.A., the moderate left Labour Party, was willing to assist Greece fully. The cost of health care, which at present takes 35 percent of the Dutch budget and may increase to 50 percent in the near future, also showed significant differences.

Several leaders took a purely economic approach to the issue. Rutte defended the idea that competition of doctors and hospitals would lower the cost of health care. In contrast, Roemer took a more “ethical” approach, using examples of people hurt by the existing system.

Although Geert Wilders can be witty, what many perceive as his rudeness and his one-



Increasing secularization in the Netherlands affected recent election.

sided solution made him the great loser on election day. His party tumbled from 24 to 15 seats. Consequently he will have no influence on the to-be-formed government.

Another loser was the recently elected CDA party leader Sybrand van Haersma Buma, of the right centrist Christian Democrats. They partnered the VVD in the previous cabinet. In 2003 the Christian Democrats were the largest party with 44 seats, but they retained only 21 seats in 2010 and declined further to 13 seats this year. Observers have said the party’s decline was due, in part, to Buma’s lack of charisma, even though he was solid and sincere in the debates. More important was the division

See Election on p.8

News

Medical professional warns of risk in surrogate, donor pregnancies

DENVER, Colorado (CNA) — Artificial reproductive technology is “absolutely” the commercialization of the female body and is especially harmful to children, a medical expert and documentary filmmaker says. It’s “buying and selling children,” asserts Jennifer Lahl, founder and president of Center for Bioethics Culture.

Lahl says that although the argument could be made that egg and sperm donors are being paid for their “time and effort” and not the children they help produce, ultimately “there’s money changing hands and there are children being passed around.”

Attempts to popularize such forms of medical technology, as seen in “The New Normal,” a sitcom that just debuted on the NBC network in the U.S., are “dangerous” because they “delude us into thinking there’s no risk,” she says. The show, which focuses on a same-sex couple who use a “desperate and broke – but also fertile” single mother to surrogate a child for them, touts the tagline “Surrogate mother, surrogate family.”

“Here’s a young woman who’s a single mom who needs money. Here’s these two gay men,” Lahl explains. “They want the child; she needs the money; everybody is happy.” However, artificial reproductive technology is not as simple as the sitcom presents it to be.

Aside from the known health risks, these methods have “deconstructed men and women’s bodies and reproductive capacities,” which have in turn, “disintegrated the family to the point at which the NBC show is saying, ‘This is the new normal,’” says Lahl.

The show, which first aired Sept. 11, has even received criticism from some secular media outlets as being overtly offensive. Lauren Bans of *GQ*, in previewing the show, described it as “gay characters excusing a cotton bale’s worth of cringeworthy, racist jokes.” Willa Paskin of *Salon* wrote that the pilot episode left her unsure of whether one of the main characters and fathers “wants a kid or a fashion accessory,”



New documentary challenges the perception that the infertility industry is the “new normal.”

when it is revealed that his desire to have a child is rooted in wanting, “to have baby clothes and a baby to wear them.”

Designer babies

Lahl notes that because customers are paying large sums of money to produce a child – sometimes as much as \$100,000 – they would like “the best possible outcome.” As a result, customers may have “children made by design,” since they can “pick and choose” which desirable traits they would like their child to have.

Another consideration people should take into account, Lahl says, is the impression and influence a surrogate mother has on children she may already have. “What does [surrogate pregnancy] do to a young child being raised by a mom who has babies and gives them away? And who has babies and gives them away for money?”

Lahl, who has 25 years experience as a pediatric clinical care nurse, wrote and directed the 2011 award-winning documentary *Eggsplottation*, which exposes the dangers of the infertility industry. She also directed the 2011 documentary *Anonymous Father’s Day*, which features interviews with people who are the children of sperm donors.

Currently Lahl is in the pre-production stages of a docu-



Syrian Christians taking up arms in self-defense

HOMS, Syria (CWN) -- Some Syrian Christians in Homs, Aleppo and other cities have begun to take up arms and patrol neighborhoods in self-defense.

“The situation is complicating,” said Roman Catholic Archbishop Mario Zenari, the apostolic nuncio. “As hopes of a rapid end to this crisis dissipate, anger and desperation grow.”

Syria’s bishops have asked Christians not to take up arms, according to the Missionary International Service News Agency. Nonetheless, following the arson attack on the office of the Syrian Catholic Archdiocese of Homs, some Christian defense groups have formed.

“A few weeks ago the government distributed weapons in the areas most at risk,” an anonymous source told the news agency.

The recent formation of militias was linked with a fire set at the Homs archdiocese office, in the Hamidiyeh neighbourhood. “The fire may be a sort of warning to not enter into the conflict,” said the source, who requested anonymity for security reasons. The source said the creation of defence groups “is surely not widespread.” He noted, too that aside from few cases “there are no longer solely Christian neighbourhoods.”

mentary exploring the stories of surrogate mothers. “There are really just a lot of people out there who aren’t happy about these technologies, who have experienced them up close and personal,” she says.

One of Lahl’s main concerns with egg donation is the lack of research on the long-term health risks associated with powerful fertility drugs used on already fertile women, and the danger of egg extraction on a woman’s body. “One of the realities is that this is a relatively new practice,” Lahl says, “and we’ve never done any comprehensive, long-term studies on the effects on young women who are taking these drugs and undergoing these procedures.” She feels that “the infertility industry is preying on young, healthy women who we know need the money to undergo a procedure we know has some risk.”

Memoir: Justin Bieber’s mom was advised to abort her now famous son

Marian Van Til, with files from LA Times, LSN, Blaze

LONDON, Ontario — In a recently released memoir, Pattie Mallette, 36, reveals that, beginning at age four, she was sexually abused by more than one man, that she began drinking and taking drugs by age 14, and that at 17 she was nearly convinced to abort the baby she was carrying.



She resisted that advice. Her resistance changed her world – and ours. Pattie Mallette is the mother of Justin Bieber, the wildly popular, enormously wealthy Canadian pop sensation who is known – and screamed over by adolescent girls – the world over. That no doubt explains why in an interview last year, the then-16-year-old Bieber said, “I don’t really believe in abortion.”

In *Nowhere But Up*, Mallette (with her co-author A.J. Gregory) writes, “I’ve spent most of my adult life sifting through the tangled web of emotional wounds and the debris left by the darkness in my childhood.”

Grateful to God

She says she got her footing with the help of a Christian counselor. “I’m really grateful to God and to all the people

who have surrounded me and loved me,” she told *USA Today* last month when her book came out. On the NBC’s *Today* show Mallette told Kathy Lee Gifford regarding keeping her baby, “I didn’t know how I was going to do it. But I just knew that I couldn’t abort. I had to do my best, and I was determined to do whatever it took.”

As for publicly revealing her struggles, Mallette says, “I always wanted to write a book about my story. I wanted to be as vulnerable as I could, so that young girls who have been through similar things could relate. I pretty much bared my soul. It definitely furthered my healing process.”

When pregnant with Justin and near her due date she checked into a home for pregnant girls in London, Ontario. She described the scene: “When the car rolled down the small hill of a driveway and all I could see was fading taillights, the floodgates opened. Down tumbled tears of shame. Tears of remorse. Tears of fear. Tears for the unknown. As I gasped for air in the middle of a sob, I forced myself to calm down. All I wanted to do was check in and go to my room where I could be alone. I was engulfed by a sense of loneliness yet wanted to fester in those feelings by myself.”

Since then, Mallette’s life has obviously changed dramatically and positively. As for her famous son, and being



Bieber fans around the world are grateful for Mallette’s decision 18 years ago.

a mother to that son, she says, “I will always be his Mom. So I don’t have any problems whatsoever telling him what he doesn’t want to hear and being a mom. He still needs that.”

Column

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

The figurative truth



If I rip out your heart, and walk around with it, you will die. On the other hand, Elizabeth Stone once wrote: "Making the decision to have a child is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." So which is true?

Well, it's literally true that you can't live without a heart. It's a fact. But if you're a parent, you know that Stone's quote is true in a different way. It conveys a figurative, poetic truth. It describes what it means to be a parent, and to be truly human.

So both are true. But the former doesn't leave much room for debate while the latter could lead to a very long discussion about the intense, sometimes sorrowful love we have for our kids. It's powerful stuff.

Jesus knew the power of figurative truth. Through his parables, he spoke about the nature of God, of man, and of our relationship. He knew that poetic, figurative language is strong. And that facts – particularly when it comes to things like love, or grace, or joy – are too weak to describe something so complex or powerful.

That's why Christ did not say: "The kingdom of heaven is 200,000 square miles, contains 10 million people whose first language is Aramaic and produces dates, pomegranates and grapes." That's why he said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed." And, again: "the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for pearls."

No one thinks the kingdom of heaven is a merchant or a mustard seed. But sermons delving into the truth of those metaphors have been preached for hundreds of years.

When Jesus was asked why he taught through parables, he replied: "because it has been given to you to know the mysteries (*mysteria*) of the kingdom of heaven, but it has not been given to those . . . because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

Jesus taught that figurative truth was superior because it provokes discussion, study and meditation. Similarly, the apostle Paul speaks about the need to earnestly study the gospel to fully understand its truths. Because, in the words of the German theologian Gerhard Tersteegen: "A God comprehended is no God."



How are these like the kingdom of heaven?

And yet many Christians – who accept that the parables are metaphors – insist that, elsewhere, the Bible is technically accurate when it comes to history or science. This is essential to their faith. They argue that if the Bible is not inerrant, it's not infallible. In other words – if it's not literally true, it must be absolutely false. Those are the only choices.

Picky readers

Yet absolute biblical literalism is a pretty tough road to travel, because – even



Parables provoke discussion and study.

the earth is flat – the Bible is full of statements that are factually wrong. Biblical literalists get around this problem by saying that the Bible is true according to the best ideas that were available at the time it was written. It has to be read in context, they say.

Fair enough. The Bible isn't a science textbook. But what about the large group of Christians who defend the notion of "traditional marriage" by pointing to the Old Testament?

Weighing in on the debate about gay marriage, biblical literalists point to passages like Leviticus 18:22 to support traditional marriage. But there is no effort to place that passage in any kind of context. On the other hand, passages like Deuteronomy 22:13-21 – which instructs husbands to stone a non-virginal bride, or Leviticus 18:19 – which calls for the stoning of both a husband and a wife if they have sex during a woman's period – those passages are glossed over or contextualized.

Literalists also insist that the first book of the Bible needs to be taken word-for-word as scientific fact, but have no problem accepting the last book of the Bible as figurative prophecy. That's not a judgment, by the way, but it is an observation – one is read as "literature" and the other isn't.

It seems that literalists are quick to place into context those passages that conflict with their preexisting beliefs and slow to contextualize the ones they agree with. That – in hermeneutical terms – is the difference between *exegesis* (letting the text speak to you) and *eisegesis* (bringing your own ideas to the text).

So, really, there is no such thing as a true biblical literalist. We all read the Bible and explain errors of fact by placing them in context. And all Christians – "liberal" and "conservative" alike – are guilty of reading into the text rather than letting it speak to us.

But what gets lost in the current debate about literalism is whether or not we should be trying to receive the gospel that way at all.

A glimpse of God's majesty

If Christ has wanted to deliver a series of lectures about the nature of God, he could have done so. If God had wanted David to lay out a logical treatise on the relationship between God and his people, Psalm 23 would read much differently. Christ instead chose to tell stories. God inspired the Psalmist to write poetry.

Some of us get so hung up on defending the Bible as literal, factual truth, we miss the point. Poetry and literature are profound – often superior – ways to tell the truth. God himself says so. After all, God doesn't literally show himself to us. He can't. As Moses learned, we can't handle the whole truth of God, all at once. It would overwhelm us.

Rather, the most significant thing God has ever said about his true nature was to literally reveal himself figuratively.

As Christians, we confess that God's infinite majesty was made flesh in the figure of Jesus. We don't understand that incarnation, fully. How the trinity works is a mystery. But we do know that we are meant to contemplate Christ, and his meaning for our lives, through our whole lives. We are meant to walk with him figuratively – not literally. What is important is that we agree to do so.

As Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me."

What that means, literally, takes all of us exactly a lifetime to understand.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Election *continued*

within the party over the willingness to form a cabinet that needed the support of Wilders. The daily newspaper *Trouw* indicated another factor in the decline: "Even ministers don't vote Christian anymore." Secularization has spread from city to countryside.



Prime Minister Rutte.

Since Rutte was seen to defend his positions skillfully during the debates, most people saw no surprise in the VVD leading in the polls. In contrast, the recently-elected P.v.d.A. party leader

Samsom seemed to have a mediocre start, but began gaining ground toward the end of the campaign and surpassed D66's Roemer.

While there are significant differences between the two parties, they have a majority and at the time of writing they are indeed discussing forming the next gov-

ernment without including other parties. If they succeed, they may give the stability the Dutch electorate hoped and voted for.

Observers say the election raises some interesting issues. Buma has declared that he will rebuild the CDA stone for stone, but with increasing secularization it seems unlikely that a significant Christian voice will be heard again in the Dutch parliament. The other Christian parties remain too small to exert any influence. Many people complained that the polls exerted too much influence and favoured a stop sometime during the campaign. Fact-checkers were seen to contribute to honesty during the debates. While in earlier times voters voted on principles, now they appear to vote more and more on personality. As in Canada, the healthcare cost are hotly debated.

In spite of significant theoretical differences, most critics said the campaigning was fought in a civilized manner without mudslinging.

Reviews



Renowned Hamilton poet pays tribute to urban trees

Adele Konendyk

October is here, and the season of dying leaves will soon be upon us. But at least Hamilton is beautiful in autumn. You need only take a walk along an Escarpment trail bordered by fall-enflamed branches to know that. Many of our urban streets are lined with majestic maples, oaks and sycamores. To live here is to be accompanied by hundreds of thousands of perennial woody plants, to watch them grow, change, come and go in our parks and in cemeteries, in the open spaces of our own backyards.

Naked Trees

by John Terpstra
Wolsak and Wynn
Hamilton, ON: 2012

These are the very trees that award-winning Hamilton poet John Terpstra praises, questions and ponders in his newly republished collection *Naked Trees*. First released in 1990, this edition features beautiful woodcuts by Wesley Bates, another Ontario artist. And you need not be an arborist, a poet, or even a Hamiltonian to appreciate this gorgeous multi-poem meditation on gifts of nature most of us daily take for granted.

"This book pays tribute to the fallen," says Terpstra in his introduction, letting you know this is not a collection that rejoices in the living trees without lamenting those lost. He is tender with his subjects – grateful for them, and admits that as a writer and a cabinetmaker, he owes them a great debt.

The first section tells a story familiar to many: a tree forced down. In this case, it is a silver maple in Terpstra's neighbourhood taken by a city work crew. With it go memories and histories – not just Terpstra's, but also those of the people who lived so long in its orbit. Its absence brings "a loss of equilibrium. And the entire street feels less secure." And haven't you felt this? Or seen a street of someone you know so altered?

Throughout the book, Terpstra's melancholy yet patient tone is just right – neither melodramatic nor blithe, and always ripe with fresh metaphors. Chunks of tree do not just "sit" on the ground – instead they "lay scattered on the lawn like oversized building blocks that some oversized kid had kicked down."

Trees, however – even those deceased – are more than building blocks in the poet's enlivening hands. "Trees are intended to move," he says – and move they do, almost human as they bend and sway. Even when not in motion Terpstra sees in them "an overall impression of humanness" – such as a young sycamore with "the awkwardness of youth, the gangly look of a skinny adolescent, one who is all limbs, whose joints are prominent." How like us his trees are.

What Terpstra does so well, though, is balance the humanness of trees with their mysterious "otherworldliness." Every poem has at its center a profound respect for the knowledge and histories that trees have to offer those who take the time to pay them attention. "A tree will be the first to know when the rain starts" says one of the many poems emphasizing the practical and sensory knowledge of these natural additions to urban landscape. Yet it seems their full truths are always just out of our reach. Again and again, Terpstra treats them as enigmatic intercessors, since they "inhabit the world between geography and population, between earth and animal." He revels in their paradoxes of gravity and purpose without straying from their physicality.

There is lightness and wit here also. Terpstra lets his poetry play with the trees, as if he is a child playing around their trunks or beneath their shade. Take the ironic truth in the first line of "Prison," which observes that "A tree either is the view or blocks it." Or the description of a utility pole as "the pinewood of the grid-laid city." These are not poems to incite laughter, exactly – but Terpstra's winking amusement is contagious.

Naked Trees is a journey to be taken and re-taken, like a favourite path or street revisited. Perhaps the best way to read it is to embrace it as an invitation – a call to look more closely at the trees you encounter, in all environments and seasons.

This city-dweller is grateful, however, to have read this book at summer's end. My anticipation for autumn has more urgency, now – and poetic shape. I enter October with Terpstra's lyrical autumnal phrases hanging in my mind, awaiting "the annual, monumental disrobing of the trees." Even when the branches are bare, I know that I can look forward to the leaves under my feet as "new and crisp and colourful as the paper currency of a gone country." Such lines will accompany me on my strolls and hikes, and come back to me as I look out my window at Hamilton enfolded by the Fall.

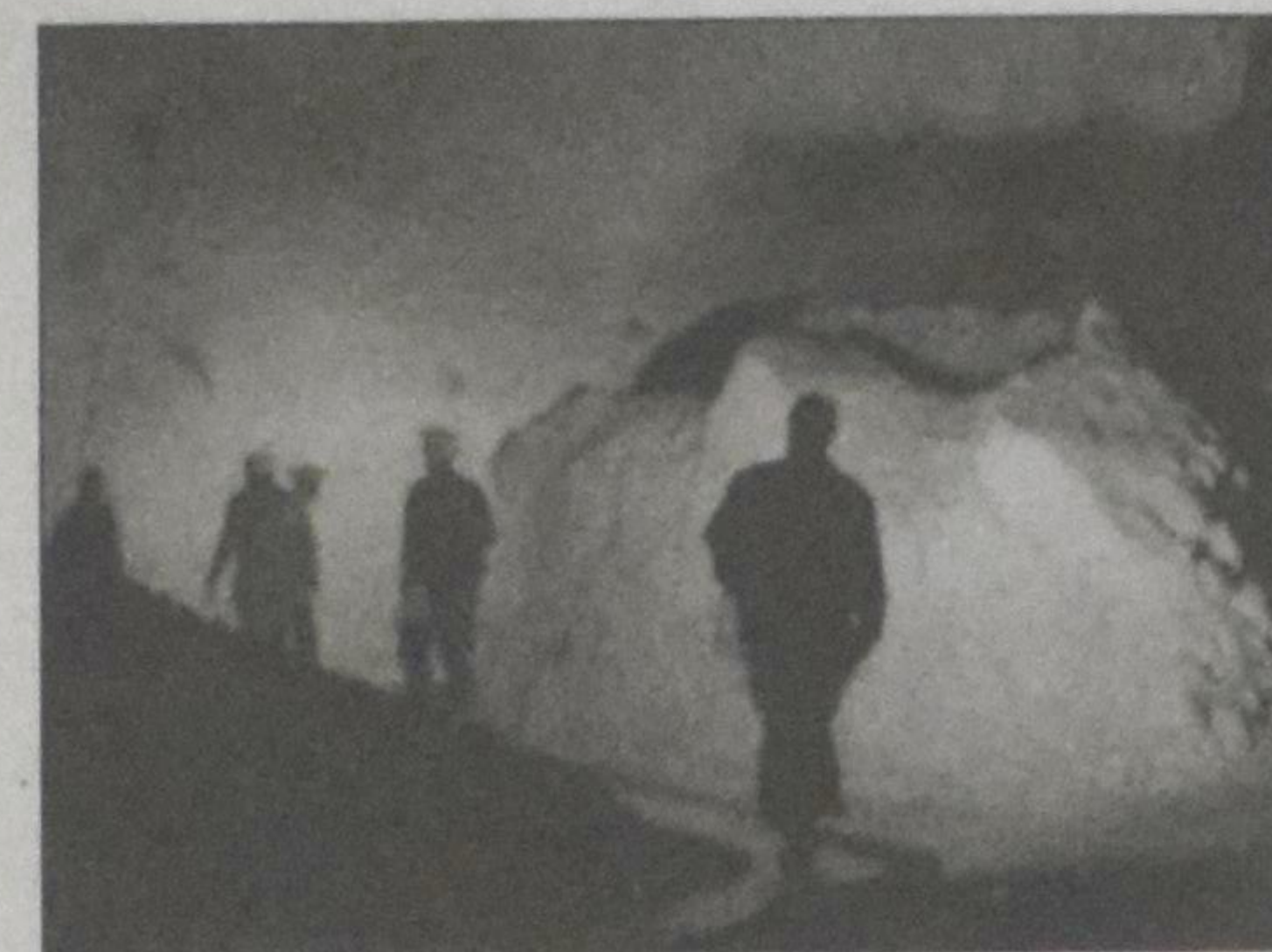
I encourage you, too, to head over to local publishers Wolsak and Wynn and secure yourself a copy of this striking, eloquently crafted work. Once you do, I daresay that you will never see trees the same way – or forget what a delight and honour it is to have a poet like Terpstra in our midst. ✂

A version of this article first appeared on The Hamilton Arts Council website.

Adele Konyndyk (adelekonyndyk@gmail.com) is a Hamilton-based freelance writer and editor. She's also a huge CanLit adorer and, like many in the country, especially fangirly about Alistair MacLeod and Alice Munro. Currently Adele is at work on her first book, a collection of short fiction.



Documentary captures some of humanity's most ancient artwork



Cave of Forgotten Dreams

directed by Werner Herzog, IFC Films, 2010

the first scientists to have been permitted access to what was, until 1994, kept hidden beneath that impressive limestone rock face, and, nearly two decades later, he continues to be struck with a profound sense of mystery in response to what he saw.

Eighteen years ago, four independent explorers discovered this cave and entered in, expecting to find the stalagmites, stalactites and mineral deposits that typically fill these pockets inside the earth. They did, in fact, find these features, but were hardly prepared for what they discovered in addition to them: some of the oldest, if not the oldest, works of art known to humanity. Drawn on the walls were numerous stunning paintings of mammoth, bison, lions and deer, the most impressive being "The Panel of the Horses" – a large section of the cave's interior featuring multiple paintings of horses that has become something of an iconic image. Thousands of years ago, apparently, the entrance had collapsed, preserving everything inside, and effectively keeping people out.



and has now recently been released on DVD.

Surrounded by the footprints and skeletal remains of now-extinct species of bears, Herzog notes that many of the cave's images, which date back some 32,000 years to the Paleolithic period, have a kinetic quality to them. Bison are drawn with six or eight legs, producing the fascinating effect of movement – what he calls a sort of "proto-cinema."

While it runs an hour and a half long, much of the footage involves either multiple shots of the same items, or multiple uses of the same shot. Herzog does his best to break up this sense of repetition by including interviews, historical footage and shots of the surrounding landscape, but in a sense, it simply could not be avoided. The film's object, after all, was a single cave, and because of the nature of the ongoing archeological work, the film crew was limited in terms of both what they were able to photograph and the length of time they had to do so (due to the build up of carbon monoxide from tree roots that reached inside).

Herzog has a way of attracting the idiosyncratic, and this film is of no exception. Included among the documentary's secondary footage are interviews with an eccentric "experimental archeologist" who appears in Paleolithic-era reindeer hides and plays the star-spangled banner on a replica bone flute he made, as well as a circus performer-turned-archeologist who, in his previous career, rode a unicycle and juggled.

Despite his eccentricities, and those of his films' subjects, Herzog has a way of eliciting a sense of the sacred as a film-maker, and he takes the role seriously. His iconic, heavily-accented English narration often borders on poetry and is more likely to conclude with question marks than periods. This is an utterly captivating film that is definitely worth watching. ✂

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's reviews editor.



Nick Schuurman

"I think *homo sapiens* is a misnomer," suggests anthropologist Jean Clottes, directly in front of the camera. The Latin title you and I have been sharing since it first emerged as a biological category in the 18th century literally means "a knowing, rational person," and given what he's seen, Clottes is convinced that "we really don't know much." We should, he argues, "be called more accurately *homo spiritualis*."

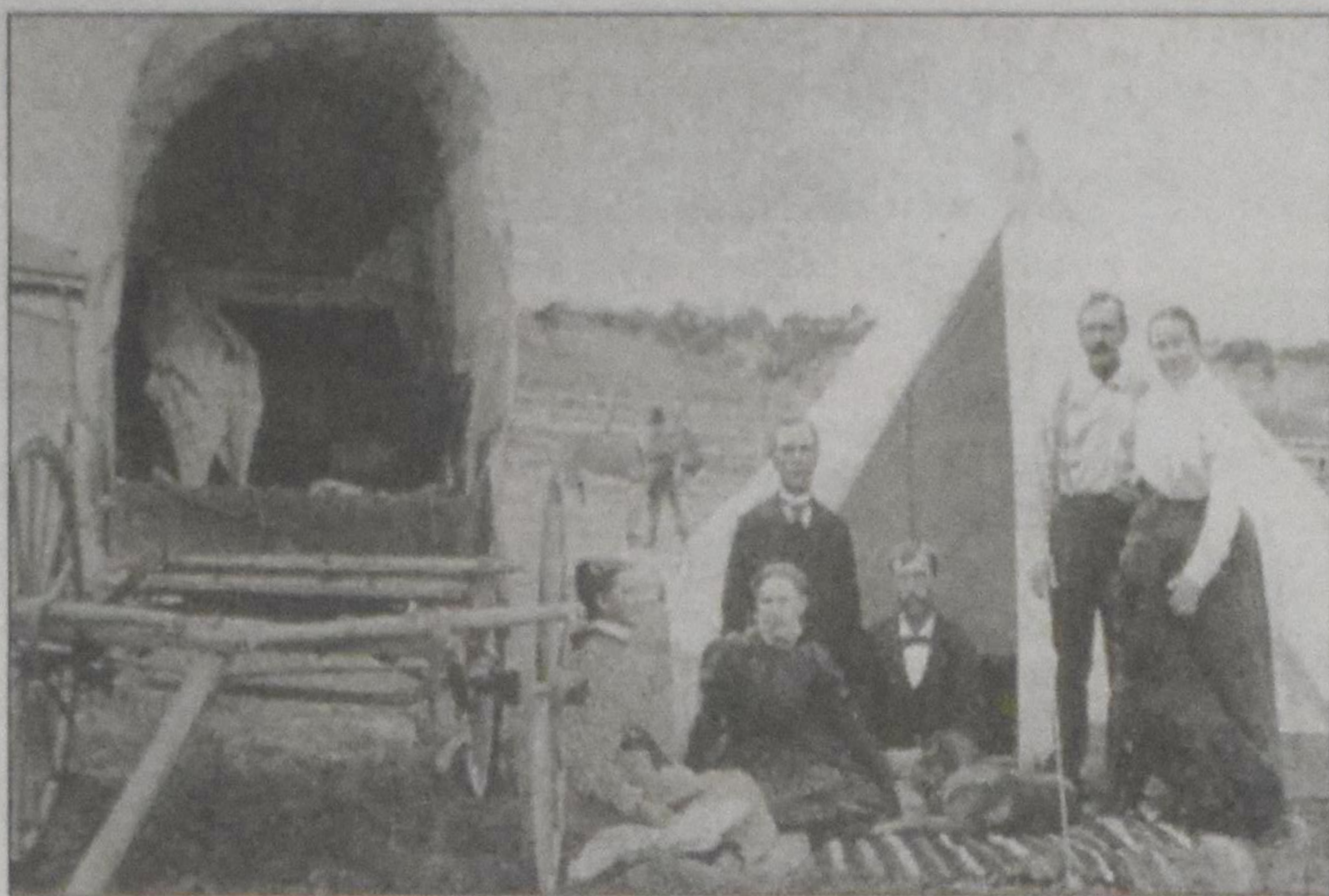
Clottes is standing outside of an enormous cave along the historic Ardèche River of Southern France. He was among

the first scientists to have been permitted access to what was, until 1994, kept hidden beneath that impressive limestone rock face, and, nearly two decades later, he continues to be struck with a profound sense of mystery in response to what he saw.

Eighteen years ago, four independent explorers discovered this cave and entered in, expecting to find the stalagmites, stalactites and mineral deposits that typically fill these pockets inside the earth. They did, in fact, find these features, but were hardly prepared for what they discovered in addition to them: some of the oldest, if not the oldest, works of art known to humanity. Drawn on the walls were numerous stunning paintings of mammoth, bison, lions and deer, the most impressive being "The Panel of the Horses" – a large section of the cave's interior featuring multiple paintings of horses that has become something of an iconic image. Thousands of years ago, apparently, the entrance had collapsed, preserving everything inside, and effectively keeping people out.

This being one of the most significant archeological discoveries in the past century, the cave was once again sealed shut – this time by professionals in order to keep people out and maintain the conditions inside. In the spring of 2010, however, Bavarian film-maker Werner Herzog (*Into the Abyss, On Death Row*) was granted exclusive, unprecedented access to the Chauvet cave (named after Jean-Marie Chauvet, who was among the four who first rediscovered it) to film inside. The resulting documentary, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, appeared in theatres first in 3D last year,

Features



Vander Wagen and Fryling families.



At the dedication, with Zuni Mountain in the background.

The New Zuni Mission School – still at the heart of things

James Calvin Schaap

“What a glorious work is done there in the little Christian school-room,” wrote Reverend Herman Fryling, pioneer missionary to the Zuni pueblo, more than 100 years ago. “Such a work cannot and will not be without glorious and lasting results for time and eternity.”

The very first class of the Zuni Christian Mission School (ZCMS), six students strong, included two Fryling daughters. In November of 1908, 11 years after the Frylings’ predecessors, Andrew and Effa Vander Wagen, CRC missionaries, rode into the New Mexico pueblo behind an impressive team of horses and created the CRC mission on the banks of the Zuni River, a young South Dakotan, Miss Nellie De Jong, was hired to teach those first six kids because the Frylings’ girls needed to go to school.

That means that for more than a century the Zuni people have had what often seemed an eccentric Anglo neighbour in its own ancient pueblo – a Christian school, an outreach of the very first mission endeavour of a Christian Reformed denomination that hadn’t yet learned the English language all that well, much less Zuni.

‘Glorious and lasting results’

This September, 104 years later, 70 Zuni students wandered incredulously into a brand new, state-of-the-art 3.5-million dollar blessing that stands proudly where the Christian school has always been. Whether or not this new facility is a fulfillment of Fryling’s grand prophecy will be answered only by the Zuni people and the God who’s watched them, and us, for a long time.

Old missionaries were likely schooled in hyperbole. What Fryling undoubtedly understood was that even glorious mission enterprises, in obedience to the Great Commission, would endure some foul moments – theological, practical, cultural, even personal problems. In just a few years, Fryling himself became a bloodied veteran of wars waged not only on the dusty streets of the pueblo, but also within the mission fortress. Often, the very existence of the mission itself was nip and tuck. In 1971, ZCMS burned down to the ground, the fire’s source still a mystery.

But we’re still there on the south bank of the Zuni River, downtown, just a few steps from the spot where Vander Wagen, the first CRC missionary, built a bridge sturdy enough to hold up a wagon and horses, a bridge that lasted for 25 years, even though some of the old Zunis claimed that if the gods wanted a bridge, they would have put one up themselves.

The CRC is still there, and this year, a new generation of Zuni kids from greatly impoverished homes walked into gorgeous new digs, right there at the bridge, a brand new beautiful mission school.

ZCMS has never been a boarding school – it didn’t need to be because the Zuni people, unlike their Navajo neighbors,

have lived for centuries in dusky, stacked village dwellings where everyone was a neighbour. Such determined community creates fortress walls, often impregnable. “Converts” have never stepped forward easily. Today the new school still calls itself a “mission school” because when the great majority of its students walk to school in the morning, they are not leaving Christian homes.

Really, ZCMS – and its own century-plus history at Zuni pueblo – is a marvel and a miracle of grace.

Contributors to Ashiwi history

The Zuni know their history far better than we do ours. They know that twice, the *Ashiwi*, the Zuni people, took refuge – first from the Spanish and then from the Mexicans – atop Zuni Mountain, an impressive and colourful mesa just south of town. Zuni Mountain, even today, means more to the Zuni than Plymouth Rock because *Ashiwi* history has been passed along reverently, generation to generation.

For at least 600 years, they have lived on the very same dusty desert ground, the place their age-old religious gods once determined to be the centre of the earth. They have deeper roots than our own highly mobile modern selves can even imagine, and those roots are powerfully religious.

Casey Kuipers, who taught Zuni children for a quarter century, once wrote a book titled *Zuni Also Prays* (1944) to remind his sometimes wary church support that being pagan did not mean the people weren’t religious.

But the mission is still there – we haven’t left. We’ve become a contributor to *Ashiwi* history because we too, with them, have survived. We’ve been a living part of their story for more than hundred years, an achievement we should be far more proud of than we are. Nowhere in any pueblo village in North America is there anything similar to the Zuni Mission and School.

When the American Public Broadcasting Company created a documentary about Native America, they titled it *We Shall Remain*, an odd idea to white folks, who might more boastfully title our own stories “we have arrived.” A world of difference stretches between those two assertions.

Even when there were so many good and obvious reasons for us to leave, as did other optimistic mission endeavours, we stayed. American reservations are littered with Godly intentions, but our story in Zuni is this, at least: we’re still there. We have persisted, as stubbornly, it seems, as God’s own grace.

After fifty years of his own often tempestuous ministry in Zuni, Andrew Vander Wagen, who in the earliest years of

the 20th century rode the fastest horse on two New Mexico reservations, told the CRC that in the early days he had to learn not just to preach, but to listen. “I always tried to plan with them,” he wrote. And then this: “They meant well with us and knew we, in turn, with them.”

That cryptic assessment is the foundation for trust and commitment, ingredients of respect-filled human relationships.

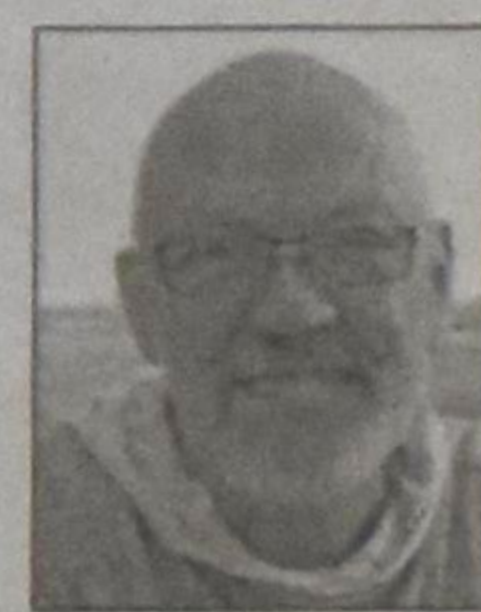
In 1992, when the entire mission effort was slogging through one of its most difficult moments – low enrollment, budget difficulties, troublesome issues – there was serious talk of closing up shop. But the Zuni people themselves made it very clear – even those who had no regard for the Christian religion – that Zuni would not be Zuni without the Christian mission at the heart of the pueblo. The *Ashiwi* made it clear that closing the mission and the school simply was not an option. They wanted the mission.

This year, praise the Lord again for his loving-kindness. Praise the Lord for a brand new, gorgeous school, a gift to the Zuni people from the ever-flowing grace of God, who divinely shapes great beauty from our heartfelt attempts at obedience, even when those attempts create a grand mess. Praise his holy name for his grace to the *Ashiwi* – and to us.

On September 10, in a kind of folk fest dedication, dozens of Zunis and as many and more mission veterans, some in their nineties, all of them players of an incredible story, smiled and even shed tears in grateful, heartfelt thanks for what was, what is now and what, by God’s continued grace, is yet to be in the ancient New Mexico pueblo. I was, that day, blessed to attend a beautiful dedication right there at the brand new school, Zuni Mountain itself ponderously looking down into the pueblo, as it has for thousands of years. The Lord of heaven and earth was there too, I’m sure.

The CRC story of Zuni is this: we’re still here. Thanks be to God. We’re still there with them, trying our human best to be witnesses of God’s enduring love. This year, right here where we’ve always been, there’s a beautiful brand new school just across the river, in the middle of the pueblo. Praise the Lord.

James Calvin Schaap is professor emeritus at Dordt College. He is the author of over twenty books including the recently published Honest to God, Sixty at Sixty and Rehoboth: A Place for Us. He blogs at siouxlander.blogspot.com.



ZCMS student enjoys a new computer.

Features

Thanks-giving for women who fear the Lord

Melissa Deelstra

The world of skirts, beauty products and hair styling has always seemed terribly intimidating and impenetrable to me. My mom used to call me a “tomboy.” I really would rather play with the boys. My favourite grade school memory is racing out to our makeshift soccer field, with shoes-for-posts, for a game of soccer with the boys. I eagerly awaited summer when I could spend whole days with my best guy friend Jason. We built straw bale forts in the barn, went on adventures, dug for treasures and tried to race dirt bike trails with our bicycles. Throughout three different high schools, I found that guy friendships were infinitely less work than girl friendships. Boys did not seem to mind jeans and t-shirts every day and did not get worked up about who liked whom or who said what about someone else. In university, I found myself hanging out at the boys’ dorm playing midnight snow soccer and watching movies. As I chose my area of study, I found myself drawn to Religion and Theology courses. Not surprisingly, I was one of the few girls studying Greek in my last year at Redeemer University.

After university, I married my best friend Tom. He went back to school for his teaching degree and we welcomed our beautiful baby girl, Hannah, to our family. Upon finishing his studies, Tom was hired as the High School Bible teacher at Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria. We packed our six suitcases and moved our little family to Africa. While I was nervous and excited about what God was going to do through us in Nigeria, I was completely unprepared for what God was going to do *to me* and *in me* there. Through relationships with women who resemble the woman described in Proverbs 31, I learned that it is both a privilege and an incredible responsibility to be a woman who fears the Lord.

Missionary grandmas

I met the woman who would teach me the most about being “a woman who fears the Lord” at orientation, a few short weeks before we left for Nigeria. I’m not sure who loved Carol first, my daughter Hannah or myself. Within a few days of arriving at the Hillcrest compound, Hannah was already calling her “Grandma Carol” and most people were assuming that she was my mother. I did not mind.

Carol, having lived in Nigeria longer than I have lived anywhere combined, held my hand as I stumbled through adjusting to a completely different world. She “... is energetic and strong, a hard worker... when she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instruction with kindness” (Prov. 31:17, 26, *NLT*). She taught me how to make yogurt, fresh bread and cinnamon rolls. Even though it took a heap of flopped dough and three step-by-step lessons for me to finally produce my own batch of fresh

cinnamon rolls, Carol’s praise made me feel like I was born to bake!

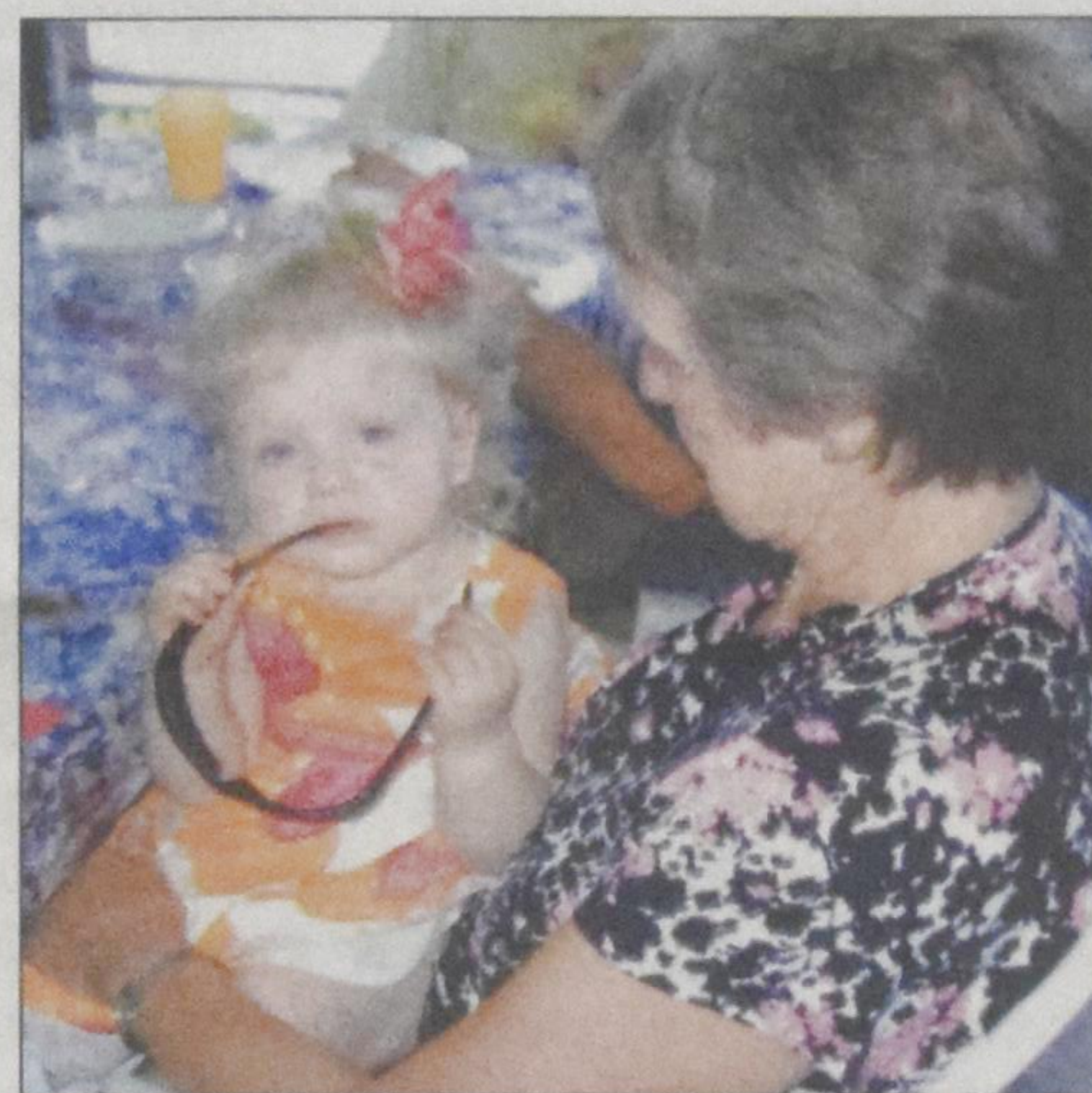
In the spring, a six-hour relay race was organized at Hillcrest to raise money to build wheelchairs for polio victims in Nigeria. I initially decided that I could not survive a six-hour relay race. Give me a 90-minute soccer game any day, but more than two-dozen laps around the track? I was not even sure if that was possible. After Carol signed up, my excuses sounded lame. When we had finished the relay race, I was just thankful that Carol and I were on the same team because I am fairly certain that she can power walk a mile faster than I can run it... and she would probably encourage me as she walked past.

Carol is one of Hannah’s *two* missionary grandmas. It is unlikely that I will ever meet a woman as devoted to the Word of God as “Grandma Jacie.” Long before I have even considered getting out of bed, Jacie has spent hours in prayer, Scripture and study. She “... gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls... and her lamp does not go out at night” (Prov. 31:15, 18b, *NIV*). Each Wednesday, Hannah and I would join Grandma Carol and up to four others in her Nissan Sunny to drive to Bible Study Fellowship where Grandma Jacie serves as the teaching leader to hundreds of women in the city of Jos. Usually in jeans and a t-shirt, Jacie would dress up in a beautiful and bold traditional Nigerian dress, complete with matching head tie, and lead us through a study of the Acts of the Apostles. Jacie is so familiar with, or part of, the Nigerian culture that there were many times when she would slip into Hausa. Everyone would laugh and I knew I had missed the joke. She is a humble servant-leader who is passionately bold for the Word of God. She is my hero.

One Sunday in February, the church we met in each Wednesday was bombed. After some discussion, it was decided that Bible Study Fellowship would still meet on Wednesday, but with increased security at another church location until repairs were completed at our regular building. As Hannah and I entered the church’s sanctuary, I saw what I had expected... only a few women brave enough to come to Bible study. I dropped Hannah off at the children’s program and wondered how the Fellowship would continue to function in the face of such severe persecution. When I returned to the sanctuary, however, I could hardly find a chair.

Women of courage

The sanctuary was filled with women praising the Lord. We opened in prayer and shared song sheets. With nothing but our voices, we began to sing, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.” Nigerian women sing hymns differently than we do in our North American CRC’s. The words are the



Melissa receiving the hand-off from Carol (above).

Canadian Thanksgiving with Grandma Carol in Jos, Nigeria (2011) (below).



Grandma Jacie, Hannah and Melissa.

same, but it becomes something very different. I used to think that they were singing it wrong; the timing was wrong, the emphasis changed, the words mispronounced – but I was mistaken. On the chorus, the women broke out into different parts and filled the round, open sanctuary with their incredibly powerful and passionate voices. I looked at the song sheet and was completely lost. I listened as the women echoed one another and became one unified body of women singing to God. I felt out of place, like an outsider witnessing an intimate moment between God and his children.

While I am a child of God, I did not realize how big he really is. These women were not singing my old hymns to my God; they were worshipping the God who was Lord over Nigeria long before I came there. In a country where Christians are persecuted for their faith, these women were boldly worshipping the God of all creation as loudly as they could. With all of my education in religion and theology, I am afraid many of these women can tell you more about God than I can.

As Thanksgiving approaches, I am again grateful for and challenged by these women in Nigeria who fear the Lord. While I am not sure I will ever feel comfortable picking out a skirt, applying makeup or styling my hair, I am privileged to be a woman who fears the Lord. As a mother, I face the task of teaching my daughter the joy of also becoming a woman who fears the Lord. I can only pray that I might be as hardworking, kind, humble, bold for the Word of God and capable of trusting in the Lord as these women that I follow.

Melissa Deelstra is busy establishing a home in Chatham, Ont. with Tom and Hannah.



Features

The bullied bus monitor, the Internet and the church

Rachel Baarda

This past summer, North American media outlets were abuzz with the story of a fundraising campaign in support of Karen Klein, a New York bus monitor who was taunted by several Grade 7 bullies during a bus ride. One of the bullies uploaded a video of the incident to Facebook. It was subsequently uploaded to YouTube, where it went viral... and where it was viewed by Canadian Max Sidorov. Feeling sorry for Karen, Sidorov took to the fundraising website **Indiegogo.com**, hoping to raise \$5,000 to send Klein on a vacation to lift her spirits.

By the end of his campaign, Sidorov had raised more than 100 times his goal, reaching a total of \$703,873. The money was enough not only to send Klein on a holiday, but also to allow her to retire from her job.

Elsewhere this past summer, the Christian research organization Empty Tomb inc. was preparing its latest report on church giving. Its most recently published report, with findings partially available online in the Huffington Post, is entitled "The State of Church Giving in 2009." The report shows that compared to the previous 41 years, church giving has reached a record low. In 1968, church giving as a percentage of member income was 3.11 percent, but in 2009, it was about 2.4 percent. Between 1968 and 2009, benevolence spending dropped from 0.66 percent to 0.38 percent. Even before the recent recession, church giving was slowly but steadily decreasing.

Stingy Christians?

If church giving is on the decline, how did Max Sidorov manage to raise such a staggering amount of money in one online campaign? Does the compassion and generosity of the secular world put Christians to shame? Or are there other factors at work?

Sidorov's online campaign tapped into the increasingly widespread phenomenon of social media – online tools that promote public participation – and their ability to encourage individualized campaigns and small donations. On **Indiegogo.com**, anyone can create a fundraising campaign free of charge, complete with a video and description of their cause. (The website does charge a 4-9 percent fee as a percentage of any money raised.) Anyone can also donate to a cause: making an online donation is almost as simple as clicking a mouse.

Indiegogo.com displays a wide variety of campaigns. For example, as this article was being written, over \$5000 had been raised for surgery for a sick puppy, and over \$13,000 had been donated for a family who had lost their home and small publishing business in a fire. Often, individual donations on the website are small, sometimes only \$25 or even \$1. Multiplied by many donors, though, the money quickly adds up. The \$13,000 sum for the family who lost their home and livelihood was raised by 133 people.

If people are so willing to donate online for charitable causes, why is congregational giving decreasing?

There are a couple of plausible reasons for the discrepancy. World Renew (formerly CRWRC) Canada Director Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo notes: "There are studies that show a general trend over the years towards a declining of institutional and church loyalty in giving. Even in the CRC, people have diversified their giving more over the years to donate to an increasing number of causes outside the CRC, including online campaigns." As Kaastra-Mutoigo suggests, at least in the CRC, Christian generosity might not be

decreasing – Christians may just be donating to a wider variety of causes.

Secondly, online campaigns might not be as impressive as they seem. These campaigns are often successful because of the collective result of many small donations, rather than many large donations. In other words, online donors might not be more generous than church donors – there just might be more of them.

In any case, though, the phenomenon of online fundraising raises new questions. How should churches, Christian charities and individual Christians respond when confronted with the reality of the new donation options facilitated by the Internet?

Criteria for giving

Firstly, whether we donate online or by the cheque-and-envelope method to the institutional church or parachurch organizations, we should keep in mind the attitude with which God wants us to give.

People who use old-fashioned donation methods may feel proud of themselves for tithing faithfully to their local church or making a major donation even when other members fall behind on church giving. On the other hand, others may look at the result of a mass fundraising campaign and be pleased that they made even a token donation to such a worthy cause. Instead of comparing our generosity with others' giving or patting ourselves on the back for contributing to a popular campaign, however, we should remember that God knows exactly how much or little each person has to give – as Jesus revealed in the story of the widow's offering (Luke 21).

For those who are interested in donating online, the wide range of campaigns can be both exciting and overwhelming. Anyone who wants to support a struggling friend or even a stranger can go online with a persuasive video and story and collect donations from hundreds of Internet users. At the same time, we should be judicious when we browse websites like **indiegogo.com** and decide to give to a cause. Is the cause legitimate? Is it a worthy cause? If a cause has already surpassed its fundraising goal, might it be wiser to give our money elsewhere, even if the cause is close to our heart?

Furthermore, how should Christians balance their giving? Should we be donating more to our congregations and less to other charitable appeals? Malachi 3:10 commands God's people: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." In the days of Malachi, "God's house" was the temple. Today, we think of the house of God as the church.

The church includes the institutional church, but it is not limited to it. In the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, the King ushers the "sheep" on his right into their inheritance: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me,

I was in prison and you came to visit me... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (25:34). All Jesus' brothers and sisters are members of the church – not necessarily just the institutional church, filled with members who might be more worried about worship styles than about what they have to eat and drink, but also the wider body of Christ, including those who are struggling to hold on to faith in Christ despite adverse circumstances. When God asks us to bring our tithe into his house today, I believe this includes both our local church and the body of Christ that extends



Karen Klein on a pleasure boat cruise.

STEVEN SENNE/AP

beyond the borders of a building.

In some ways, the weakening of loyalty to local churches can be seen as a boon to the broader church. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo explains that despite decreased institutional church loyalty, giving to World Renew is increasing: "The amount of donations from our congregations in Canada have actually increased gradually by about 5 to 10 percent each year for the last five years or so." She adds, "Even when some donors from the CRC may switch to other parachurch agencies, we also gain donors from outside the CRC for the same reasons of declining loyalty to other parachurch agencies."

Kaastra-Mutoigo also notes that donations to World Renew are increasing because of online donation options: "While there are certainly members in congregations who may give more to other organizations because of their online campaigns, there are other church members who increased donations to World Renew because of our online giving appeals and increased number of options for donors to give."

21st century: still about giving

I think that as Christians we should be cautious about jumping on the bandwagon for the latest popular fundraising campaign, but we can also be excited about the way online technology facilitates charitable giving. Proverbs 3:9 tells us, "Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops." The digital technology now accessible to us in the 21st century can be seen as a form of "wealth" that should be used to honour the Lord. If one man can use the Internet raise over \$700,000 for a bullied bus monitor, how much more can many Christians do for a world of needy people?

We are reminded of a hurting world in occasional news stories or during holidays such as Thanksgiving, but in reality, the world of the bullied, the hungry, the thirsty and those who are struggling with poverty, addiction, illness and the consequences of sin, is all around us all the time. God did not give us resources for our own pleasure or to hoard them for ourselves; he gave us time, talents, technology and monetary treasure to pour back out to others in his name. As a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi declares: *For it is in giving that we receive...*

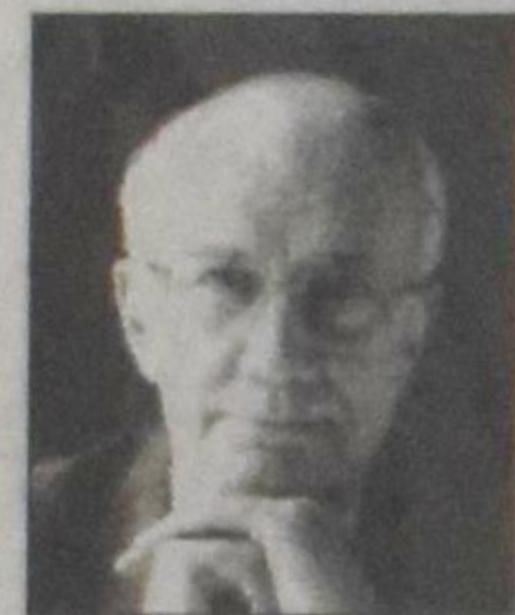
Rachel Baarda works as a donor relations communications assistant at Mission Services in Hamilton. She recently completed her M.A. in Communications at the University of Ottawa, where she wrote a thesis on Barack Obama's social networking site.



Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides



On Sunday October 31, 2010, nine Al-Qaeda terrorists stormed into a Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad, where the service had just begun, and killed 58 people

while wounding many others. It was the worst massacre of Christians in Iraq for many years.

This attack was part of a pattern of intensive persecution of Iraqi Christians which, ironically, have become worse since the end of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. The persecutions have become so severe that many Christians are fleeing from Iraq, so that their numbers in that country have dwindled from more than one million to fewer than 500,000.

Standing with the persecuted church

One person stands out in Iraq because he refuses to leave. He is the Reverend Andrew White, pastor of the St. George's Anglican Church in Baghdad, located in the same neighbourhood as the Syrian Catholic Church. St. George's Anglican, too, has endured bombings and the murder of many of its members.

Reverend White, also called the "Vicar of Baghdad," has encountered on a daily basis the dangers and difficulties of living in Iraq. He has been beaten, jailed (one time in a room strewn with bloody fingers and toes), had a *fatwa* on his head, and can only venture into the streets surrounded by bodyguards and wearing a bulletproof vest.

Andrew White was born and lived in England where he began his professional life as an anaesthetist, but he felt called to become a priest in the Anglican Church and was ordained in 1990. He served as curate in two churches. In his student years he had taken a keen interest in the study of Judaism and Islam, and he became active in the International Council of Christians and Jews.

In 1998, at age 33, he was appointed as a canon at Coventry Cathedral. There he was Director of International Ministry, including responsibility for directing the International Centre for Reconciliation. This position required extensive travel and meetings with many leading people in the Middle East.

The first major assignment the Reverend White took on was an attempt to mediate between Israel and its Muslim neighbours. He met with many diplomats and politicians on both sides of this divide and made remarkable progress in bringing people together who had never met, let alone agree on a joint statement of peace. But this occurred with the signing of the First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land in January 2002, which included this statement:

Andrew White, a man of courage under fire

"We seek to live together as neighbours respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious inheritance."

Reviving St. George's Anglican Church

When the Reverend White first travelled to Iraq in 1998, he initiated the work of renovating the building of the St. George's Anglican Church in Baghdad, which had stood empty since 1984. He started to hold services, though at first they were poorly attended. When he returned to Iraq again shortly after the war in 2003, he was surprised that the main building of St. George's was not damaged.

Ironically, since the end of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the plight of Iraqi Christians has become much worse. All the gruesome tools of dictatorships, such as kidnapping, imprisonment, torture, murder and destruction of businesses, have been used to make life for Christians impossible. Despite that, St. George's has grown and now serves 4000 people who worship there, while the poor receive a weekly supply of food. (Due to the flight of many Iraqi Christians, membership has declined somewhat.)

Several members of the Reverend White's staff and many members of St. George's have been killed, including 93 in 2010. Converts to Christianity are especially threatened. The Reverend White secretly baptized 13 new Christians. Word must have leaked out; within one week 11 of them were dead. Despite these and other unspeakable crimes, the church services are well attended and lively.

People often ask White why he spends so much time in a dangerous place such as Baghdad. He answers that is where he is sent, and that's why he is never afraid. He writes: "However dreadful the tragedy, my Lord is there. Amidst the greatest havoc I have witnessed in post-war Iraq or in Gaza, or in Bethlehem during the siege, I have still seen his glory. . ."(The Vicar of Baghdad, p.171).

He concludes his book with a hymn that he wrote himself and that sums up his experience in Iraq. Here are two verses:

*The bullets fly, the rockets thud.
I long, O Lord, to see you here,
To see your peace breaking through.
Oh, reconcile me now to you!*

*I see your glory shining through.
The darkness fades at your command.
The glory heals the brokenness.
Oh, reconcile me now to you!*

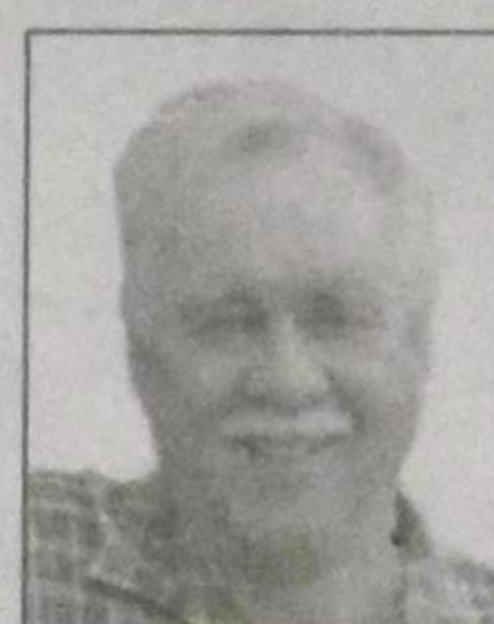
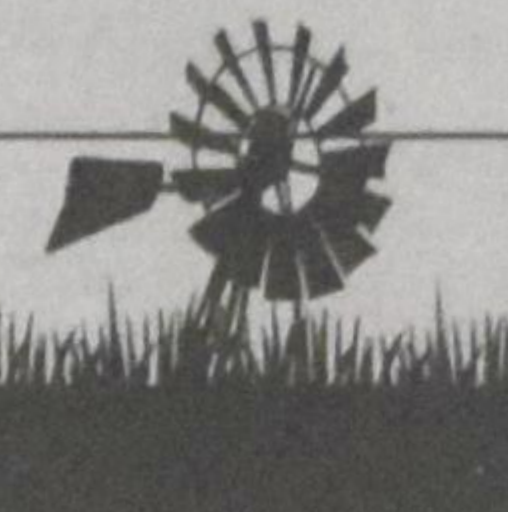
Harry Antonides is the former director of research and education for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He lives in Willowdale, Ont., and can be reached at hantonides@sympatico.ca.



McMeekin surveys this year's abnormal corn crop.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien



The summer of 2012 will be remembered as a dry one. Renfrew County was probably the driest county in Ontario. It was worse in the mid U.S. states. Despite that, we have a lot to

be thankful for this Thanksgiving weekend. The wheat crop was excellent. Hay is of excellent quality. There wasn't always a market for hay, so farmers switched to growing soybeans and corn. That's why there's a hay shortage in eastern Ontario. Pastures greened up again in late August after some rains.

There's no question it was a difficult summer for farmers, but it was great for politicians needing some exposure. Very few folks around here could name the provincial agriculture minister, but that changed a little this summer when the Grain Farmers of Ontario organized a tour for Ted McMeekin on two area farms. He made the news – standing in a dried-up cornfield with one host farmer and seen chatting with farm leaders at the other bone-dry farm.

McMeekin wasn't the only politician capitalizing on our disastrous crops and parched ground. A few days earlier the Conservative agriculture critic, Ernie Hardeman, was in the riding, meeting with farmers in town hall. He wanted action from the McQuinty government. Hardeman drove down rural roads with two crop farmers as guides and checked out the worst corn fields in the area. The press tagged along for the event. You'd think it was the first time in history that there was a summer drought.

Not bothered by drought

The local radio station asked me to be a guest on their weekly community program, and I gave a talk on how California farmers deal with no summer rains. The pop song says it: *It never rains in southern California*. I toured California twice and saw firsthand how they grow tremendous crops in desert-like conditions. They've been doing it for 70 years. California has eight million acres of farmland; 7.6 million is irrigated during the entire growing season. They have 308,000 acres in tomatoes and 400,000 acres in lettuce. Ontario has 18,200 acres in toma-

Learn from the drought: Hay shortage due to declining hay acreage

atoes and the same in lettuce. California has 40,000 acres in strawberries. Ontario has 4,000 acres. They have far more dairy and beef cattle than Ontario does. I didn't whine or complain about our drought.

The next Sunday a woman at church asked me if the drought affected me at all; she had heard me on the radio show. That had me thinking. At one time all the rural churches were full of parishioners on Sundays. Not just the older folks but entire families went to church, even in the horse and buggy days. Look at the rural churches now. Are folks turning away from God and worshipping other things that are dearer to their hearts? I would say so.

What does the Bible say about drought and famines? There's the story of Joseph in Egypt, the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine (Gen. 41:53). In Jeremiah 17:8 we read that those who trust in the Lord are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Amos 4:7 is about rain not falling everywhere it's needed. Deuteronomy 12:13 is about obeying commandments; if you worship the Lord, then he will send you rains in the proper seasons so you can harvest good crops and have lush pastureland for your cattle.

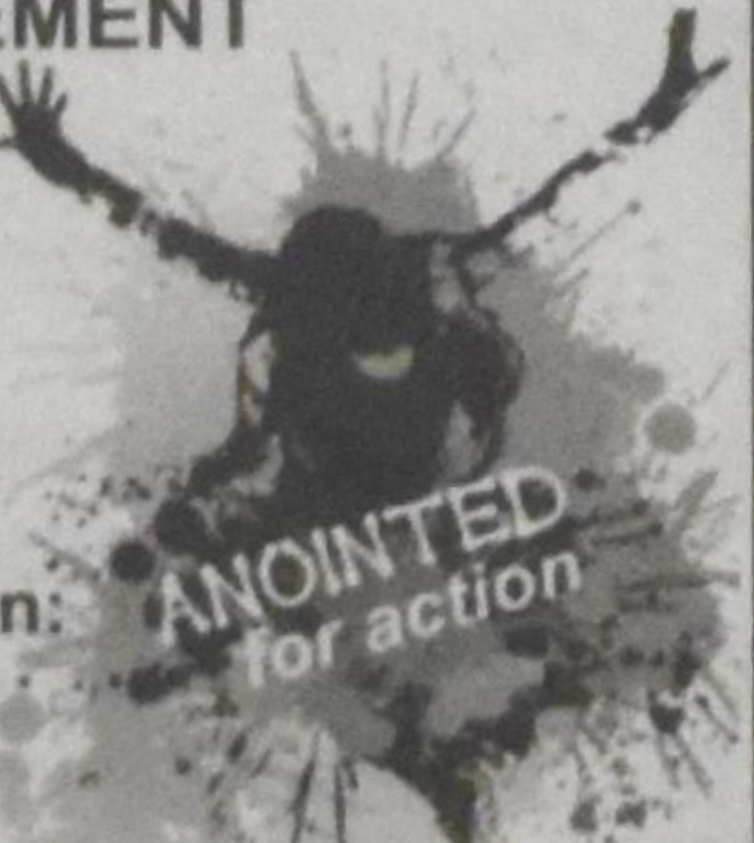
Look what has happened to our Sundays.

When I was a teenager we had a three-year drought in eastern Ontario from 1963 to 1965. It was hotter than it was this summer. Some days it was 100 degrees F (saw that in my daybook). I learned valuable lessons from those dry years that stayed with me all my life.

Farmers of today should look back at 2012 and learn from it. A drought is terrible when it hits you three years in a row. That could happen again. Don't count on governments to help you. Even if the agriculture minister comes to your parched area with a TV news crew.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew area farmer. He grows mostly hay because it never fails, even in a dry summer. He does not grow soybeans.

Classifieds

Anniversaries			Classifieds
1952 OCTOBER 2 2012 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8  MARKUS AND ADRIAANTJE (JEAN) HOVING Thankful for God's grace and faithfulness in their lives we wish them God's richest blessings as they celebrate their 60th Wedding Anniversary. Harry Hoving – Bradford, Ont. Marcia & Richard O'Hearn Jodi & Jay Saville Liam Mark & Jamie Hoving Thomas, Aly Susanne & Sam Visser – Gilford, Ont. Christy & Rob Poole Eva Angela & Jeff Kerk Julia Lisa Bas & Diane Hoving – Aurora, Ont. Melissa & Greg Moulton Leah & Kyle Venema George & Joanne Hoving – Bradford, Ont. Michelle & Dave Finley Laura Leslie & Matt Simpson Darryl Bill & Grace Hoving – Newmarket, Ont. Colin, Brittny, Kristen Jane & Harry Jansma – Innisfil, Ont. Adam Jansma & Jennifer Hughson Samantha Sarah & Scott Gutcher Rebecca Jansma & Shawn Brann John(†) Catherine Fletcher & Ken Down – Barrie, Ont. Sheena, Neil, Cate Elizabeth & Michael Allen – Newmarket, Ont. Joshua Mike & Tammy Hoving - Holland Landing, Ont. Jacob, Daniel, Naomi, Rachael Home Address: 105 - 282 Hurst Drive Barrie ON L4N 0Z3 Canada	1952 October 17 2012 <i>"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"</i> Ecclesiastes 4:12b (NIV) NICOLAAS AND HILLY LENOS (nee VanderWal) celebrate their 60th Wedding Anniversary with thanksgiving to God for His faithfulness throughout their lives. We pray the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in His tender care. Congratulations from your children, 18 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren: John & Bev Lenos – Waterford, Ont. Shawn & Laura Lenos (Tyrell, Bailey) Sandy & Al Steenbeek (Kelstin, Kylee) Brad Lenos Nick & Lindsay Lenos Ray & Sonya Lenos – Simcoe, Ont. Annemarie, Jessica Clarence & Julie Lenos – Caledonia, Ont. Wilma & Albert Veenkamp – Sarnia, Ont. Nicole, Matthew Howard & Joanne Lenos – Kitchener, Ont. Karla & Dan Magee Josiah, Jared, Derek Hannah & Bob Elgersma – Wisconsin Rapids, WI Karmen, Calvin, Katrina Rosanne & Andrew van der Woerd – Burlington, Ont. Shannon, Esther, Joseph Home address: R.R. #5 Waterford ON Canada NOE 1Y0	1962 – September 1 – 2012  With celebration we announce the 50th wedding anniversary of CO AND ALICE VANDERLAAN (nee Hoekstra) Congratulations and love from your children and grandchildren: Deb and Gord Bosker Denise and Ray Dykstra Brad & Erin, Todd, Alex, Sean, Jamie, Kelly, Tia, Damien Mitchell, Tessa Karen and Dave Groenewold Darren Vanderlaan Nathaniel, Jeremy, Miriam Nirveli, Kyle, Indyanna We thank God for you and the many happy years we've all enjoyed together. We wish you continued health and happiness! Co and Alice's home address: #111 - 10041 149 Street Edmonton AB T5P 4V7 Email: alco1@shaw.ca	DEADLINE Christian Courier is published on the second and forth Mondays of the month. Deadline for each issue is 13 days prior to publication date. RATES: All personal and family announcements: \$6 per square inch. Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$8 per square inch. PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph. TO SUBMIT: E-mail admin@christian-courier.ca Mail: 2 Aiken St. St. Catharines ON L2N 1V8 or on-line at christiancourier.ca follow the classified link.
Henk and Roelie Katerberg September 29, 1962–2012 Thankful for God's blessings during these 50 years. Friends and Relatives are invited to celebrate with us at an OPEN HOUSE, Saturday, Oct. 13 from 2:30-5:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the Drayton Christian Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario. Best wishes only please. Home address: 14 Conestoga Drive Drayton ON N0G 1P0			Obituaries Patricia (Bilker) Van Huizen (June 5, 1922 – September 2, 2012) Patricia passed away at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ontario at the age of 90. Pat was born on June 5, 1922 in Holwerd, Friesland the Netherlands. She immigrated to Canada in 1952 with her husband, Eize. They resided most of their married life in the Trenton, Ontario area. The ravages of Alzheimer's in the last few years may have robbed her memory, but her loving spirit knew no bounds. Pat was predeceased by her husband Eize. (1982). Missed but lovingly remembered by her six children, 24 grandchildren: Peter and Jackie Van Huizen – Langley B.C. Eric (Tracy), Nicole (Dan), Richard (Jessica), Nathan (Jill) and Danielle (Jake) Ben and Willy Van Huizen – Stirling Ont. Julie (Peter), Jonathan (Julia), Isaac (Jeanette) and Maria Marten and Ruth Van Huizen – Surrey B.C. Jason (Lindsay), Philip (Helena), Jeff (Jolene), Naomi (Jeff), Alicia and Joel (Megan) Ann and Bill Vandenhorst – Maple Ont. Paul and Alan John and Judy Van Huizen – Trenton Ont. Matthew (Julie), Nicholas, Magdalyn (Matt) and Jared Betty and Guy Couture – Buffalo, New York Rosanna (Josh), Marc and Stephanie And 21 great-grandchildren. She is remembered as a loving mother, story teller, and an incredible example of how faith in God can bring joy, hospitality and peace to those around her. A Memorial Service celebrating the life of Pat was held Thursday, September 13th at Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, Trenton. <i>Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.</i> Psalm 91:1
Personal "Young" Christian lady in her mid 50's, with energy and a zest for life seeks to meet a genuine, outgoing man for friendship and possible relationship. Should this spark interest please respond to File #2774 c/o Christian Courier 2 Aiken St. St. Catharines ON L2N 1V8 Note: Family ads are now on our web-site at christiancourier.ca			Theresa (Tietje) Smeenk (nee Dykstra) passed away peacefully on September 21, 2012 ready to meet her Heavenly Father in her 96th year. Beloved wife of the late Henry Smeenk for over 61 years. Devoted mother of Yvonne (Bill) Korince, John (Sylvia) Smeenk, Frank Smeenk and Margaret Todd, and Wilma Smeenk. Proud grandmother of Kim, Derek, Jeff (Sarah), Brent (Lauren), Andrea (Shawn) and Brock and great-grandmother of Andrew, Bailey, James, Kasey and Ellen. Survived by sister-in-law Maaikje Dykstra and brother-in-law Johan Smeenk. Cherished aunt to her 15 Dykstra nieces and nephews in Canada and many nieces and nephews in The Netherlands. Predeceased by her parents and all of her ten siblings. Theresa will be fondly remembered for her devotion to providing a comfortable home for her own siblings, the families of employers and her own family; avid volunteerism for organizations in her church and Christian school communities; meticulous craftsmanship in sewing, knitting, crocheting and needle point, avid reading, playing cards and board games, and joy of camping and trailering with family and friends. A Celebration of Life took place on Sept. 26, 2012. In lieu of flowers, an expression of sympathy may be made in the form of donations to Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, ON. The family would be pleased to accept on-line condolences at www.hulseandenglish.com. <i>If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.</i> Romans 14:8
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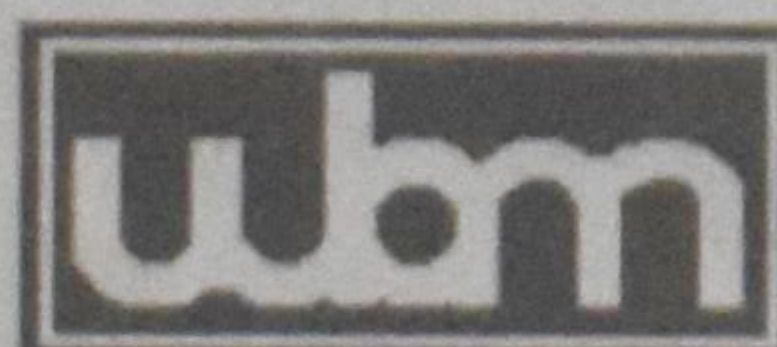
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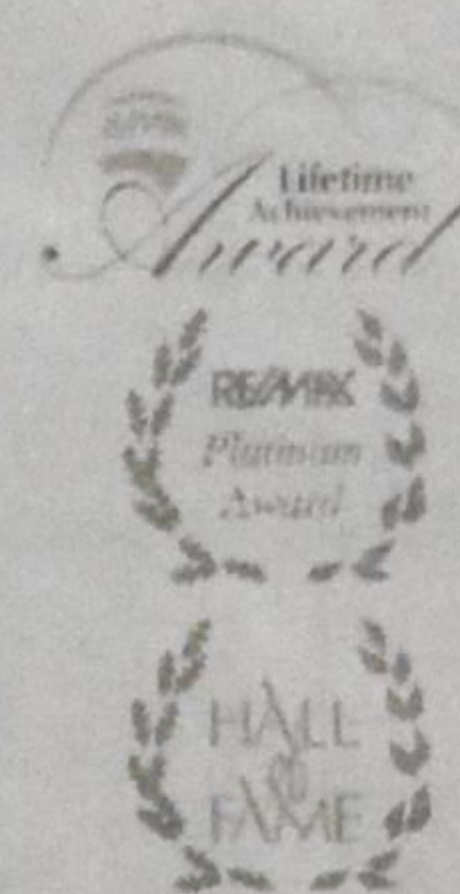
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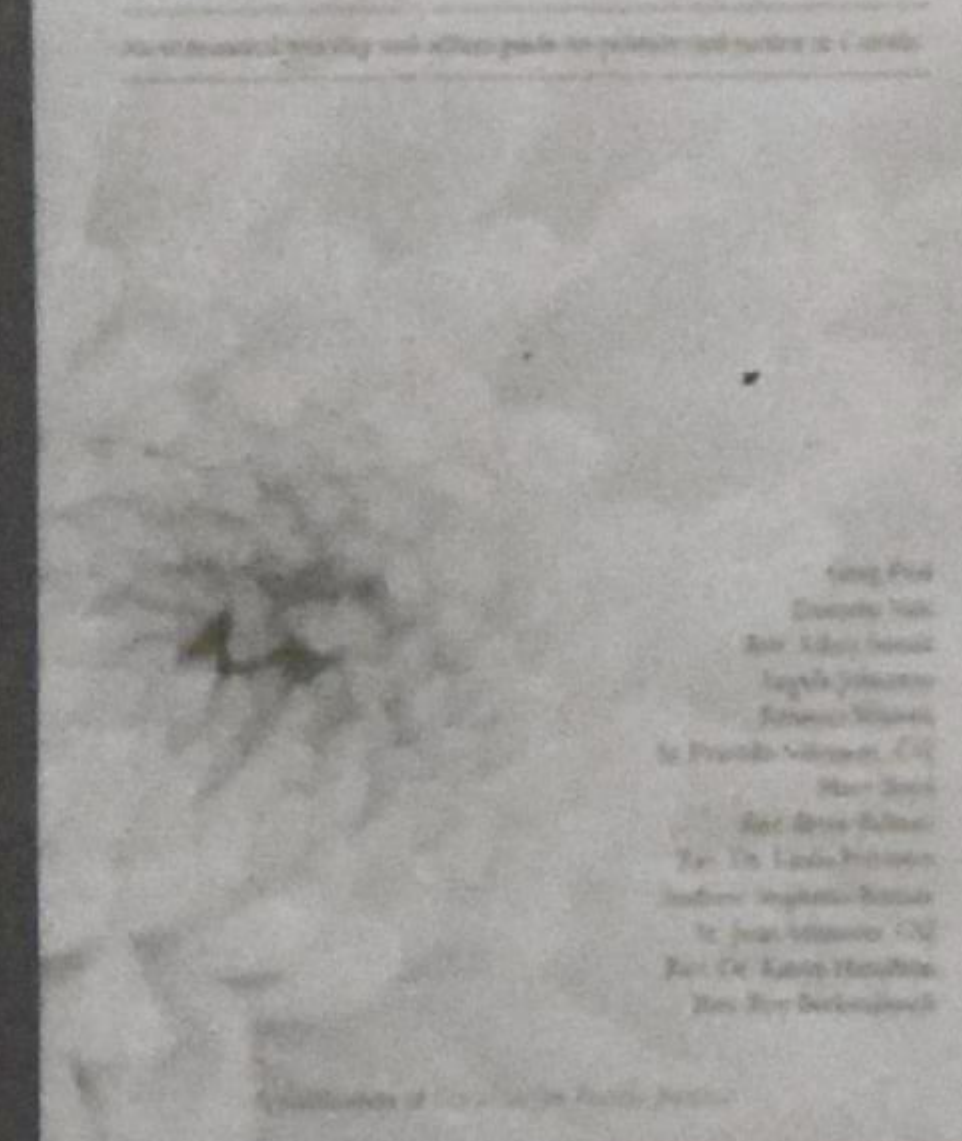
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Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



I don't think God minds that summer is my favourite season, but I had better be grateful for the rest of the year, seeing as that too is his creation. So, since autumn is the traditional season of

Thanksgiving, I decided to count my blessings. I soon discovered there were days from every season this past year that stood out as particularly wonderful.

A year ago, on a sparkling October afternoon I witnessed my grandson Romario enter the world. I got to hold him before the nurses cleaned him up. I still smile as I recall his raspy little lion's roar and the fragrance of his silken skin.

We all adored the new addition to our family and did our best to help Jessica through those early days of motherhood. Romario thrived, but he suffered from colic and Jess learned to live on minimal sleep. In spite of the challenges, she quickly proved to be a natural born mom.

By the time he was six weeks old I had my foot surgery. In the short, dark days of November it was my turn to accept the help and loving care of the family. Daniel, my first-born grandson, was especially attentive. He brought toys to my bedside, told me stories and checked every day to see if my "feet" were "still broke."

Just before Christmas, Jessica and Romario moved in with us. I could spend only limited time on my feet, but I cleared out space to accommodate our new housemates. Our empty nest had become full to overflowing in the years since Jess had left home. I made several trips to the dumpster, sent numerous bags off to the thrift store and relegated piles of semi-useless stuff to storage. I knew the day of reckoning would come in the future.

As I cleaned and sorted, I wondered how we would all adjust to living under one roof. Then I realized that God was challenging me not only to get rid of some physical clutter, but to make room in my heart for the great blessings he had in store. The only caveat would be not to get so attached that I might fall apart when Jess and R.J. moved out again.

As if on cue, at the age of three months Romario got over the colic and began sleeping 11 hours most nights. The first time it happened Jessica tiptoed downstairs early in the morning. "Mom," she whispered, "R.J.'s been sleeping since 8:00 last night. Do you think he's okay?"

"Is he breathing?" I asked.

She nodded. "I checked him every couple of hours overnight."

"Then he's still alive," I said with a smile.

Every splendid season

Although I couldn't go outside for walks on those crisp winter days, I enjoyed the mornings Romario spent nestled in Jack's arms as they both woke up. I watched him grow and learn and explore the world around

Counting my blessings



Heidi's grandson R.J. helps count a year of blessings.

him as only an infant does. And I had conversations with my daughter that never would have taken place if she hadn't lived with us for awhile.

Jack and I cut the winter short with a trip to Florida in March. We could have stayed home and ridden our motorcycles around here. The warm weather came early and never left.

Jessica helped me plant spring flowers while Romario played on the porch and Daniel dug in the sandbox.

On Mother's Day the whole family sat in the front yard, enjoying the sunshine. James and Willene arrived with a planter and the news that their next child is due in November.

Family activities ramped up for the celebration of Stephanie and Aaron's wedding in June. What a golden day it was, to watch my beautiful daughter come down the aisle and exchange vows with her beloved groom.

On July first Jessica and Romario moved into a place of their own. I shed a few tears, knowing a special time of life had passed. But I soon got busy facing the dreaded storage unit and dealing with all the leftover treasures that had to be re-assimilated into the household.

Summer was full of glorious afternoons by the pool with my mother-in-law, and excellent motorbiking weather. A serious drought threatened the field crops and I wondered how it would end. But as I write, wheat and soybeans fill the granaries. We have a shed full of the cleanest straw I've ever seen. The corn crop is drying down naturally, with exceptionally big cobs. It looks like that may also be harvested early.

We've come full circle since Romario was born, a whole year gone by, in all its splendid seasons. Intertwined with the highpoints were plenty of struggles, never without purpose, I know. I'm savouring the beauty of autumn, and remembering that even winter is God's idea. The fiercest wind may carry some untold blessing when it's ordained by the Lord.

Dear Christian, what's not to be thankful for? >

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

ARTFUL EYE



JOE VELTMAN

God's Harvest

Father,
when we see your majesty
teach us how to sing
with spirits lifted high
like the glorious ones
gathered around your throne.

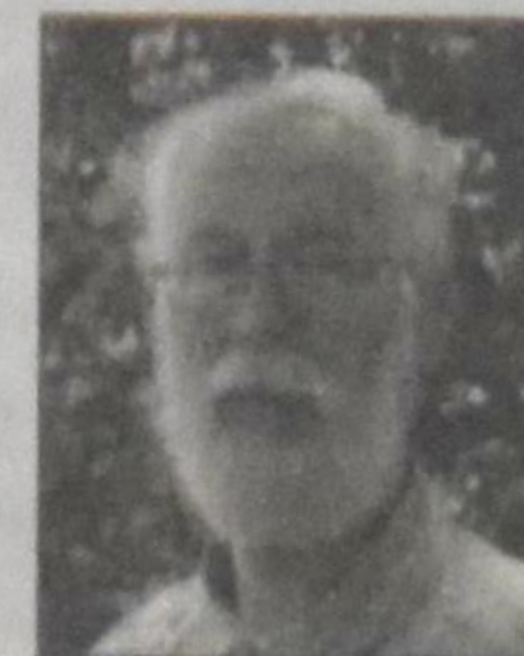
Saviour,
teach us to pray.
When we see the harvest
gathered in,
may lips that have been
with fullness blessed
reform the words
nine out of ten
forget to say.

Comforter,
when sorrow's scythes
sever earthly ties
remind us that this must be so
for those being gathered in.
As we go the longing
way of the cross
teach us still
new songs to sing.

Almighty One,
as we are gathered
around the table
you have provided,
teach us to remember
that you have made it
a thanksgiving day,
glorious,
that you may have
your harvest too.

Joe Veltman

Joe Veltman is the pastor of Calvary Community Church in New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys photography and writing poetry.



Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



Seeing and understanding



They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (Mark 8:22-26 NIV).

The story of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida in Mark 8 is a fascinating and somewhat puzzling story recounting one of Jesus' many miracles. The healing takes place in two stages. After the first stage, the man describes people as "trees walking around" (vs 24). This describes a man who has sight but cannot understand what he sees.

Functioning eyes are not the only component necessary for sight; the mind also needs to be able to process the information coming from the eye in order to interpret visual information. In the second stage "his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly" (vs. 25). After Jesus put his hands once more on the eyes of the man, he was finally able to understand what he saw.

This miracle became even more interesting to me after studying computer vision in graduate school. It clarified for me that seeing truly is not the same as understanding. Capturing an image is one thing, but recognizing an object is a significant challenge requiring complex computer programs which use visual cues to associate them with other knowledge.

Clearly Jesus could have healed this man instantaneously. But instead, the Scripture passage describes a miracle deliberately completed in two phases. It appears that Jesus had a purpose in doing this. How are we to understand this? Although it's difficult to be certain, here are a few thoughts on how this passage might be understood.

See what I mean?

I think it is no accident that this story in Mark 8 is surrounded by portions of Scripture where Jesus was repeatedly asking his disciples "Do you not yet understand?" Jesus' question to the blind man in vs. 23, "Do you see anything?" is very similar to Jesus' question to his disciples a few verses back in vs. 17, "Do you still not see or understand?" Again in vs. 18 of this chapter Jesus says, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" and again in vs. 21, "Do you still not understand?"

Immediately following the story of the blind man is the story of Peter's confession. Although Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, he still does not fully understand that Christ has to die. Shortly after this declaration Jesus rebukes Peter for not understanding that he must suffer and die. At this point, Peter sees but does not fully understand.

The miracle of the blind man, in effect, describes two cures in one. The ability to see and understand is a gift of God. I think, like the process of healing the blind man, Jesus is gradually healing his disciples – as they move from not understanding, to misunderstanding, to understanding. The gospel is an account of how Jesus is gradually "opening the eyes" of his disciples.

It is easy to criticize the disciples and wonder how they could be so slow to understand. However, we need to also look at ourselves: we too are in need of Jesus' healing for understanding. We too see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12) and the fall has given us all white canes, as Kuyper puts it.

Seeing – that's the key. When we say to each other "Now you see what I mean," we're usually referring to a spiritual kind of seeing, not simply what the eye admits in form and figure. At creation, we all came equipped with that kind of vision. But the fall dimmed our perceptions, gave us all white canes. . . . At the moment we come to see God in Jesus Christ, as he begs us to do, God Almighty, in His Spirit, comes to dwell in us. That is the moment that we draw near unto God and He draws near unto us (Kuyper, Abraham, Near Unto God. Translated by J. Schaap, p. 67).

Dr. Derek Schuurman teaches computer science at Redeemer University College. This article is based on a devotion he shared with the faculty and staff at Redeemer. He is grateful to Syd Hielema for a helpful discussion on this passage.



Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



Hard pew thankfulness



There are hard days. A wail sounds from the baby monitor just as I sit down with my morning coffee. She is angry; her little face is red and contorted. She DOES NOT WANT to nap or play with her toys or sit in her bouncy seat or be in the car. I am calm, comforting, gentle and then, suddenly, I am angry too. I have disappeared in this job that brings new meaning to the term "full time." I am taxed, tired, no break in sight.

Then the little things balloon into bigger ones. A fractured relationship comes to mind, an injustice that feels unbearable, and suddenly my faith deflates. The past comes up like a storm, like nettles through the garden, stinging fissures into peace. I fight against doubt with all I have – willing thankfulness, working hard, seeking Scripture though it seems brittle and remote. There is no epiphany on these days, just the forward movement of time, and it is heavy.

The hard days congealed into hard years back between my undergrad and graduate studies. Arrival in adulthood was a letdown and I became tangled up in doubt and loneliness, feeling unanchored and angry at God. The charismatic church I'd joined as an undergrad – that had seemed so alive, so colourful and immediate – suddenly seemed jarring and inapplicable. My faith was in tatters, God seemed more than distant, and I felt cut adrift and afraid. I was too sore for church.

How strangers can bless me

Then, during graduate studies, comfort came from unexpected quarters. A friend invited me to the Anglican church she had been attending and I went grudgingly one rainy night. Something at that church – the liturgy, the biblical saints floating in stained glass, the ancient vestments worn by the priest – gave me peace. If I couldn't engage with my full emotions, if I didn't feel my faith, I could rest there on the faith of others, and not just the knot of present congregants but the past centuries of believers who were evident around me. Answer-

ing all the questions of my religious affiliation did not depend on Emily, 26 years old, sitting there in the pew that November night. I recognized for the first time in that church something bigger than me, truer than my ability to discern it, and testified to by the Christians right there and throughout the world and throughout history. Now that was an epiphany, although it took some time to define.

Hard days now can bring me back to that rootless, doubting girl of a decade ago and leave me feeling cold. Like issues in a marriage that have power not because of a singular event but because of years of similar moments, I sometimes despair that my doubts – or at least the issues that precipitate them – continue to surface. It is at these times, now, I find myself again seeking comfort in the faith of others. Here in the midst of a few hard days that have morphed into a hard week, I am thankful for the hard pews at church, peopled with the faithful. Ten years ago I would not have believed that strangers could bless me simply by going to church every Sunday, enacting their faith in a substantial way, but they do.

So thank you to the elderly whose presence at church demonstrates the longevity of faith. Thank you to kids who embody faith's ongoing relevancy. Thank you to pastors whose role exemplifies faith's mettle to weather tough questions. Thank you to church-going families who highlight the unifying power of faith. Thank you to those who, because of your circumstances, show that faith can be unconditional. Thank you to those who show up on Sundays, who with your time and bodies testify to the truth that you affirm. This hard-pew mission work continues to be a comfort to me when answers are insufficient. I trust it has shown Christ to many.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is getting interested in Annie Proulx' That Old Ace in the Hole, but staring hungrily at The Hobbit, next in line.

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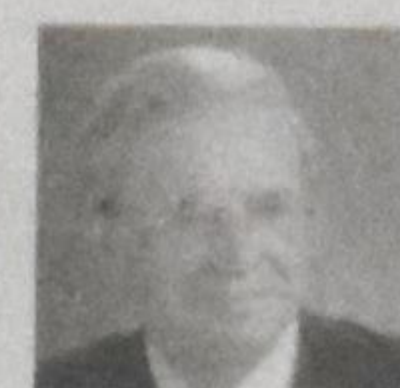
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News

Knitting group for male prisoners opens up their world

Mary Wiltenburg

On a recent Thursday night, 13 inmate members of the Knitting Behind Bars program at Jessup Pre-Release Unit (JPRU) in Jessup, Maryland, gather at long tables in a white and gray cinder-block room. Tyrell Butler, a young inmate with a gold tooth and tattoos ringing both arms, is joining the group for the first time. He watches intently as Lynn Zwerling gives him a five-minute knitting lesson.

"So, between the pearls and the neck, that's the front door. In through the front door," she says. "Then skull and crossbones. Wrap it around . . ."

Mr. Butler has come hoping to make something for his three-year-old daughter. He has been behind bars her whole life, and says he wants to make her a blanket so she'll have something from him to hold. Zwerling asks his release date. 2015, says Butler.

"Then you have time," she says matter-of-factly, pointing to the gap in his growing rectangle of yarn. "In through the front."

Zwerling made her career selling used cars at dealerships around Baltimore, while she and her husband raised two kids. Often the only woman on the lot, she buzzed with energy, outselling most of the guys. When she retired in 2007, she needed a project.

Making amends?

JPRU is a squat, yellow facility about halfway between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The halls are noisy and full of men. When Zwerling met Margaret Chippendale, then Jessup's facility administrator, she brought an infectious, almost manic enthusiasm about the idea of these felons making yarn dolls and pompom hats.

"I told her: 'Everybody wants to knit; they just don't know they do,'" Zwerling recalls.

Somehow, she made the sale.

When Chippendale pitched the idea of dozens of sharp objects being brought into the facility each week for a knitting class, her staff was less than thrilled. Even after she addressed their safety concerns — they would count the needles coming in and out of the prison each week — there was another worry: Would men even show up for a knitting class?



Lynn Zwerling teaches inmates to knit.

JOANNE CICCARELLO

Chippendale saw Zwerling's idea as an avenue for "restorative justice," a way for prisoners to give back to the community they had harmed. That, she decided, was worth the risks. She asked some of the inmates she knew best to show up for Zwerling's first class. In the weeks that followed, they returned on their own to make "comfort dolls" for children at a local domestic violence shelter.

Now, nearly three years later, 254 felons have passed through the Knitting Behind Bars program. Its annual budget is \$350, which Zwerling and fellow volunteers raise selling yarn-ball necklaces at the annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival. Other donations come through **Ravelry.com**, a social network for knitters.

This night, as Zwerling gets Butler started on his first square of blanket, down the table Dwayne Harris works carefully on a red glove, a complicated operation involving four needles.

Jessup's Knitting Behind Bars program is too recent to have had a quantifiable impact on the recidivism rates of its participants. But the program's most measurable impact may be the changes in participants while they're still incarcerated, a degree of tranquility that spills over into the rest of the prison.

Harris, who is due to be released this winter, says he'll miss Zwerling when he leaves Jessup. When he gets out, he says, he's planning to join her knitting group.

Harris hasn't told a soul on the outside that he's learned to knit. He imagines his friends and family when they find out, begging him to make things for them.

He's looking forward to telling them: "Let me show you how you can make your own." ✂

Mary Wiltenburg is a correspondent with Christian Science Monitor (CSM).

Odds and Trends

Solar-powered potties?

Bill Gates is betting the toilet of the future for the developing world will be solar powered.

The world's leading private philanthropist handed a \$100,000 prize to the California Institute of Technology in August for its work on a self-contained, sun-powered system that recycles water and breaks down human waste into storable energy.



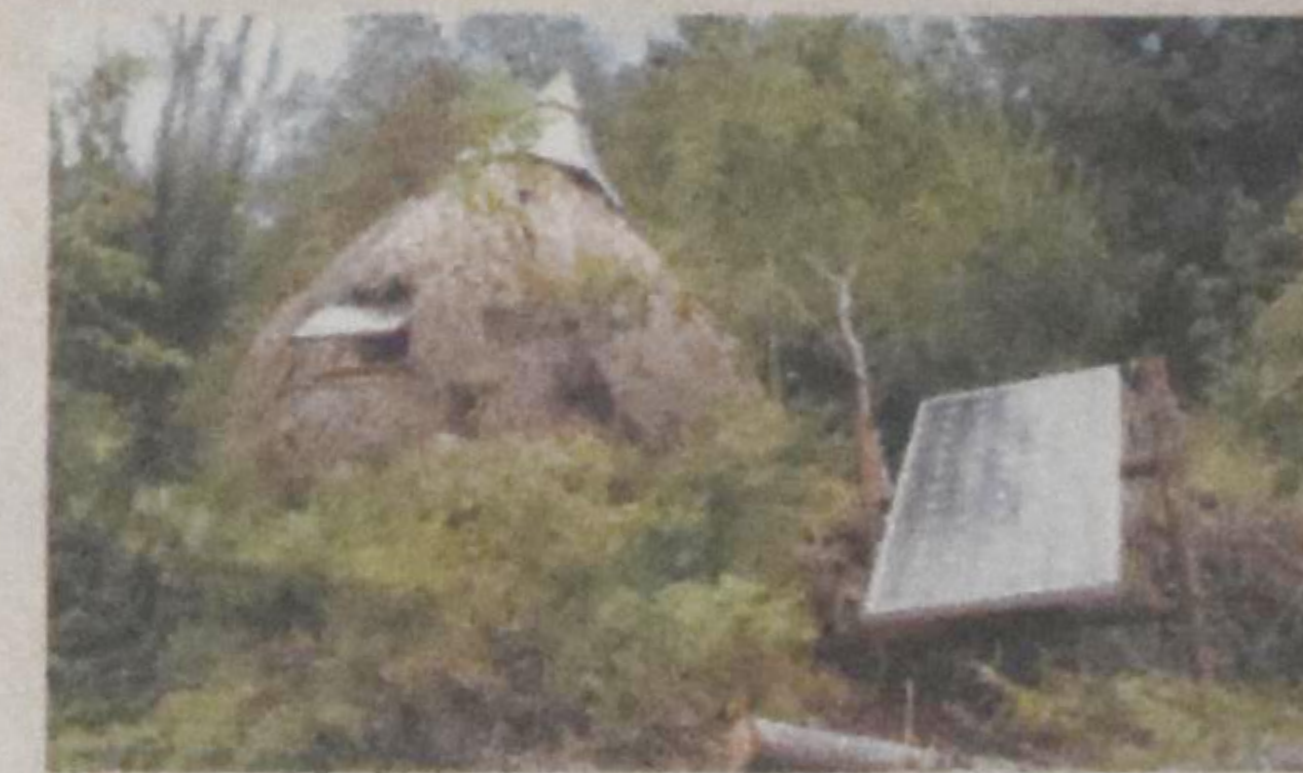
Open defecation leads to sanitation problems that cause 1.5 million children under five to die each year, Gates says, and Western-style toilets are not the answer as they demand a complex sewer infrastructure and use too much water. The Microsoft Corp co-founder is looking to change that by sparking new inventions in toilet technology, which he says has not fundamentally changed since the invention of the flush toilet in 1775.

His foundation announced \$3.4 million in new funding for toilet projects being worked on by various organizations, bringing total investment in its "Reinvent the Toilet Challenge" to about \$6.5 million. Their goal is to create a hygienic toilet that uses little or no water, is safe and affordable and can transform waste into energy, clean water and nutrients.

—CSM

'High-Tech Hobbits'

Remember Frodo and his cosy burrow in *The Lord of the Rings*? Three filmmakers in the mountains of California are building a self-declared "21st century hobbit village" in their attempt to blend a back-to-the-land lifestyle with cutting-edge technology, *Make* magazine reports. The small community, still under construction, has a three-step Do It Yourself (DIY) philosophy: idea, internet research and implementation.



"We're self-taught in every area," one founding member says. "To go from complete ignorance on a subject to execution of a project within a week is pretty normal here."

So far, the DIYers have built several thatched huts, one tiny house, an outdoor kitchen and a functional tree house. They have converted an old freezer into a refrigerator, rigged solar panels up on tree-branch frames to power their laptops and use kitchen waste water to irrigate a fruit orchard. One ambitious guest was a physicist working on the prototype for DIY industrial machines, including a compressed-earth brick press that can make 5,000 bricks a day.

Maybe when *The Hobbit* comes out this December on the big screen, the 21st century hobbit village will get some new fans — or new design concepts.

—Angela Reitsma Bick

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